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ABSTRACT

A collection of seven essays on errors in second language learning focuses on secondary school instruction in the United Kingdom. The essays address three questions that a foreign language learner might ask the teacher, including: What do you mean, it's wrong?; What do I have to do to make it better?; and Why should I get it right anyway? The first question requires the teacher to define a defective performance, and the second asks what action is to be taken to improve the performance. The third question arises from the communicative competence approach, suggesting that grammatical mistakes should not affect communication. The papers are: "Mistakes Are the Mistake" (Keith Morrow); "The Concept of 'Duly Performed'" (Stella Marsh); "The Many Sorts of Error" (Richard Beaton); "Learner Autonomy" (Rosemary Olivier); "GCSE Assessment Criteria and Their Messages for the Learner" (Brian Page); External and Internal Assessment: A Discussion of Two NFER Projects" (Peter Dickson); and "Why Do I Have To Get It Right Anyway?" (Brian Page). (MSE)

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# What do you mean... it's wrong?

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Edited by Brian Page

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# INTRODUCTION

*Brian Page*

This book, with the obvious exception of Keith Morrow's chapter, is largely concerned with learners of foreign languages in secondary schools in the United Kingdom. It endeavours to address three questions that any learner of a foreign language might legitimately put to the teacher:

1. What do you mean, it's wrong?
2. What do I have to do to make it better?
3. Why should I get it right anyway?

The first question requires the teacher to define what a defective performance is and the second what action is to be taken in order to improve it. These are old questions. Until quite recently they could be answered relatively easily since the objective of language learning was primarily the production of formally correct sentences. A defective performance was therefore due in the main to mistakes in grammar and the learner could be told to concentrate on making the adjectives agree with the nouns or to check the formation of irregular verbs. Now that communicative competence is the objective, it is less easy to define a defective performance and therefore less easy to tell a learner exactly how to improve it.

In these days when we are trying to concentrate on the positive aspects of learning, assessing and rewarding what a learner 'knows and can do', it might seem perverse to turn our attention back to describing the ways in which performance is unsuccessful. However, for all sorts of different reasons, many learners wish to do better and in order for teachers to be able to help them they have to be able to show learners where their weaknesses are.

The third question arises from this situation. If communicative competence is the objective why do the adjectives have to agree anyway since, in the main, mistakes in agreement do not affect communication?

The contributors, as contributors do, interpreted their brief widely but generally concerned themselves with the first two questions.

Stella Marsh draws on her experience as a pioneer in the development of a graded objectives scheme in Durham. The group there felt that they wanted to get away from a one-off test and move towards some form of continuous assessment which could be carried out without disrupting the flow of teaching/learning. In these circumstances it is sometimes difficult to be precise to the learner about what exactly makes the difference between an acceptable performance and an unacceptable one. Indeed, as Stella Marsh recounts, teachers themselves have a good deal of self education to go through in order to appreciate the problem.

Richard Beaton writes from the perspective of having attempted an investigation into continuous assessment in oral proficiency in a pilot project in schools in North Yorkshire. He describes a number of categories of mistakes beyond the usual structural ones and illustrates some ways teachers have found to deal with them.

Keith Morrow provides a view from the world of English as a foreign language. He describes the evolution towards a different treatment of error in foreign language testing. The assessment criteria he sets out can be interestingly compared with those of a GCSE board discussed in Chapter 5.

Rosemary Olivier illustrates ways in which learners themselves are encouraged to reflect on their own performances and decide for themselves their areas of weakness and how they should be dealt with. Objectives are defined by teachers and learners together and definitions of the skills and information required jointly arrived at. In this way if learners do not achieve their objective they can see very much more clearly why.

Peter Dickson writes from his experience of two projects carried out by the NFER. He shows how the purely external assessment of the original APU survey was used as a launching pad for a group of teachers in the subsequent MODLS project to analyse their assessment problems and arrive at systems of classroom assessment. They devised a variety of techniques which involved learner awareness of what was being done and why, including self and peer assessment.

In my own chapter I have taken the assessment criteria of a GCSE board to see what messages they contain for the learner about the nature of error and the ways to improvement.

The third question raises some uneasiness among teachers and examiners which is reflected in some of these contributions. Rosemary

Olivier says that at more advanced levels learners 'do not see their mistakes as mistakes: they don't seem to have identified these items as important at an earlier stage when they first learned them'. This is hardly surprising since the general instruction to learners up to that stage has been 'communicate at all costs and, on the whole, we won't look too closely at formal error'. However, this does create a dilemma which must be faced. A response to the third question is attempted in the last chapter. It is by no means a final statement but is intended as the beginning of an exploration which should aim ultimately at relating grammatical accuracy to communicative competence in ways which have not so far been made explicit at this level.

## CHAPTER ONE

# MISTAKES ARE THE MISTAKE

*Keith Morrow*

Teachers of a foreign language seem to face two separate problems when it comes to mistakes their students make. The first is to recognise what constitutes a mistake. The second is the methodological problem of how to intervene; what remedial action can the teacher take to help the student to avoid the mistake in future. More crucially, perhaps, how can the teacher make the students recognise that a mistake has been made.

From the perspective of a teacher in the late eighties, it may seem that communicative approaches to language teaching have had more to say about the first of these problems than the second. Indeed in this article I want to concentrate on this first question, but from the point of view of a language tester, basing what I have to say about what 'mistakes' are from work in developing a series of communicative tests of EFL. I then want to suggest that in fact 'mistakes' are not what is really important in evaluating and developing language performance.

## What is a mistake?

To the teachers of those of us brought up on a grammar-translation approach to foreign language learning, there would probably have seemed something fatuous about a question like this. Grammar was a question of rules; break the rules and you made a mistake. Circle the mistake in red pen. Get the miscreant to write out the correct version ten times. End of problem. Even if pupils had been encouraged to ask questions about why the mistake was a mistake (and they weren't!), the answer would have been simple:

> *ad* always takes the accusative. *Homo* is nominative. Therefore *ad homo* is wrong.

*depuis* always takes the present tense. *J'ai habité* is the present perfect. Therefore *j'ai habité là depuis 1985* is wrong.

On that level, of course, the problem remains as clear-cut now as it was in the past. Nothing in the communicative approach turns ungrammatical utterances into grammatical ones, and the mistakes exemplified above would still seem rather peculiar to speakers of Latin or French. But on another level we are perhaps in a position now to take a rather more sophisticated view of what is going on. This sophistication lies in our interest in two further questions.

## Why are mistakes made?

One of the great developments associated with the communicative approach has been the concern of teachers and researchers not just with product (i.e. what learners actually produce or understand) but with process (i.e. what they have to do in order to produce or understand something). It is this concern with process which has been at the root of most of the interesting methodological developments associated with the communicative approach in recent years (for instance the use of information-gap activities).

In the 1970's studies of the process of language learning led Pit Corder[1] to propose that 'mistakes' made by learners of a foreign language are actually of two quite distinct sorts. The first, to which he gave the label **errors** are caused by ignorance of the appropriate rule or structure in the foreign language. Essentially these are problems of knowledge, either of knowledge about some element of the language, or of knowledge how to use some language feature. The label **mistake** was given to a second and very different kind of problem. It may seem unhelpful to split hairs in this way and to suggest that two words which are accepted as synonyms in common usage can actually signify something essentially different. Yet the distinction between 'mistake' and 'error' is a crucial one which is highlighted by the more productive emphasis associated with the communicative approach.

A **mistake** for Pit Corder is a problem not of knowledge, but of application. Although you 'know' perfectly well that *depuis* is followed by the present tense, when you open your mouth to speak, it still comes out followed by the present perfect. This is a crucial problem for learners who wish to make use of their foreign language (for communication) rather than those who might have learnt it as an object of intellectual study in 'the old days'. The process of dredging up from your linguistic resources the right words in the right place to say what you mean is now seen as a vital part of learning to use a foreign language. When things go wrong with this process, the old traditions of the red pen and repetition may not have much to offer. In practice it may be very difficult to see whether a problem which a student is having is caused by lack of knowledge or inability to apply what she/he already 'knows'. But it behoves us to find out, because ways of helping with the problem will almost certainly be different in the two cases.[2]

## Do mistakes matter?

This may seem at first a question as fatuous as the previous one. Of course mistakes matter. Well, yes and no. Mistakes may matter for two reasons. Firstly, and perhaps surprisingly, they may be direct evidence for what the student 'knows' about the language system. The student of English who says *'Last night I taked my girlfriend to the cinema'* clearly knows that in general the past tense of verbs in English is formed with 'ed'. This will be very important information for the teacher concerned to build upon what the students know. Secondly, and less surprisingly, mistakes are equally direct evidence of problems the student is having. Whether he 'knows' that the past tense of this particular verb is irregular and has forgotten it in the heat of the moment, or whether he has never known it at all is a question the teacher may want to address.

'May' want to address, because on the other hand, mistakes may not matter. This heretical thought is perhaps the basis for the conviction among certain teachers that the communicative approach is somehow the soft option - that it allows teachers and students to become fluent users of inaccurate language and that it leads thereby to a decline in standards. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of this position, simply to note that while all mistakes hamper communication, some hamper it more than others; and that what really hampers communication may not be what we traditionally call 'mistakes' at all. This means that if it is the aim of a foreign language teaching programme to produce users of the language who can actually communicate, there may at times be other quite legitimate priorities than the correction and elimination of all mistakes. Nothing is more destructive of communication than inarticulate even if totally accurate production. 'Having a go' at least gives the listener something to work on from which communication may emerge; tongue-tied reticence kills communication irretrievably.

This over-strong presentation of the communicative case implies it may indeed be less rigorous than alternative approaches in terms of the standards it expects from learners; it also implies that a mistake is something tangible and discrete, something that the teacher can identify and treat or ignore as seems appropriate. In the second part of the paper I would like to counter both these implications.

## Communicative tasks and degrees of skill

One of the most striking characteristics of the communicative approach to foreign language teaching is that it is essentially task-based. Learning to use the language involves learning to do things through the language; students learn to do things by practising the purposeful use of language in the performance of tasks of various kinds.

Tasks may focus on the practice of specific aspects of the language (e.g. information-gap activities practising asking for information), or they may be much more open-ended (e.g. a simulation involving the production of a radio programme). What they have in common is the production of language for some defined purpose within a defined context. It is the introduction of these two elements, purpose and context, which actually sets communicative teaching apart from non-communicative approaches, and makes the requirements imposed upon the communicative learner ultimately much more stringent than those placed upon the more traditional learner. Whereas the requirements of a grammatical approach can be satisfied simply by the production of grammatically accurate sentences, a communicative approach requires learners to be able to handle in addition appropriacy. On one level, this is a relatively straightforward matter of using the right level of language for the context, e.g. knowing when to use *tu* and when to use *vous*. But on another level it is a much more complex matter of being able to use appropriate language strategies to get what you want, or to make it clear exactly what you mean. How do you express justifiable anger in such a way that it will be recognised as such? How do you complain, advise or enquire so that the addressee knows that is what you are doing? For many school-aged learners of a foreign language, these are difficult enough problems in their own language. To tackle them in a foreign language requires skills that far transcend the relatively simple ability to handle grammar in an non-contextualised way.

A communicative approach is then certainly not a soft option. But how do we set about evaluating student performance on tasks? How do we assess appropriacy? And if mere grammar is not enough, surely it has a role to play - but along with what else?

In a series of task-based EFL examinations developed by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (Certificates of Communicative Skills in English), we have started from the premise that a task may be tackled at a number of different levels by learners at different stages in their learning. The difference between an elementary learner and an advanced one is not the tasks they are able to attempt, but the degree of skill with which they are able to perform them. This seems to reflect real life to the extent that both the 12-year-old on her/his first trip to France and the French teacher accompanying the trip may wish to go into a shop to buy a souvenir. But presumably the teacher will be able to do it 'better'. What does 'better' mean? Is it just a question of making fewer mistakes?

The chart on pp 10/11 sets out the factors we have identified for the evaluation of oral interaction at four levels (similar but not identical specifications have been developed for the evaluation of written performance).

It will be seen that it is in terms of these factors that the criteria for performance at each level are defined. The factors are:

Accuracy
Appropriacy
Range
Flexibility
Size

These factors include some which focus on product (accuracy, appropriacy, size) and some which focus on process (flexibility, range). But only the first two in the list are ones which we can associate with the notion of 'mistake'. It is difficult to get out the red pen and circle mistakes in range, flexibility or size. They do not exist in isolation and cannot be added up in the way beloved of examiners (and teachers) from time immemorial. And yet these three are arguably just as significant as are more conventional measures in forming judgments about the intelligibility of a piece of language produced by a student, whether in an examination or in a real-life interaction with a native speaker. If we set ourselves standards which include these other factors, which are largely left out of account in approaches which emphasise surface accuracy above all else, we can perhaps afford to be more realistic about the more conventional measures of acceptability. (See for instance the relatively 'relaxed' specifications of accuracy at the lower levels of the Certificates.) In this case the role of the 'mistake' as it is commonly understood can be put in its place as just one (arguably minor) element in the total make-up of a student's use of the foreign language. In other words, if a learner is to communicate effectively, it is just as important (at least) to be able to take the initiative in a conversation using an appropriate range of language, as it is to avoid all mistakes. At advanced levels of language proficiency, of course one can do both; what concerns most of us is how objectives within the reach of 'ordinary' learners can be phrased.

Our specification of realistic objectives for 'effective' oral communication shows that this involves much, much more than the absence of 'mistakes', and that in most cases 'mistakes' are an accepted and expected element of genuine interaction.

It is essential, if the communicative movement is to develop further, that we are able to gain acceptance for this position and are able to show that qualitative descriptions of language performance of this sort are much more useful than quantitative listings of mistakes made. Furthermore we need to gain acceptance for the view that the expectations of student language performance implicit in such descriptions are much more realistic and valid than ones based on idealised grammatical competence.

There may be some way to go yet - but we're on the way.

## Notes

1. Corder, S P (1981) *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*, Oxford University Press.

2. For a very interesting discussion of this area, see 'Mistake Correction' by Keith Johnson in *English Language Teaching Journal*, 42/2 April 1988.

## CERTIFICATES OF COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS IN ENGLISH:
## Oral Interaction

**In order to achieve a pass at a given level, candidates must demonstrate the ability to complete the tasks set with the degree of skill specified by these criteria:**

| | Level 1 | Level 2 |
|---|---|---|
| ACCURACY | It is acceptable for pronunciation to be heavily influenced by L1 if it is generally intelligible. With support, the candidate must be able to clarify any confusions caused by lexical or grammatical errors. | Pronunciation must be clearly intelligible even if still obviously influenced by L1. Grammatical/lexical accuracy is generally high though some errors which do not destroy communication are acceptable. |
| APPROPRIACY | Use of the language must be broadly appropriate to function though it may not correspond to native-speaker expectations. The intention of the speaker can be perceived by a sympathetic listener. | The use of language must be generally appropriate to function. The overall intention of the speaker must be generally clear. |
| RANGE | It is acceptable for the candidate to have a severely limited range of expression and to have to search often for a way to express the desired meaning. | A fair range of language must be available to the candidate. Only in complex utterances is there a need to search for words. |
| FLEXIBILITY | The candidate is not expected to take the initiative in conversation, or to respond immediately to a change of topic. The interlocutor may have to make considerable allowances and often adopt a supportive role. | There must be some evidence of the ability to 'turn-take' in a conversation and to adapt to new topics or changes of direction. |
| SIZE | Contributions limited to one or two simple utterances are acceptable. | Must be capable of responding with more than short-form answers where appropriate. Should be able to expand simple utterances with occasional prompting from the interlocutor. |

## CERTIFICATES OF COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS IN ENGLISH:
## Oral Interaction

**In order to achieve a pass at a given level, candidates must demonstrate the ability to complete the tasks set with the degree of skill specified by these criteria:**

| | Level 3 | Level 4 |
|---|---|---|
| ACCURACY | Pronunciation must be clearly intelligible even if some influences from L1 remain. Grammatical/lexical accuracy is high though occasional errors which do not impede communication are acceptable. | Pronunciation must be easily intelligible though some residual accent is acceptable. Grammatical/lexical accuracy must be consistently high. |
| APPROPRIACY | The use of language must be generally appropriate to function and to context. The intention of the speaker must be clear and unambiguous. | The use of language must be entirely appropriate to context, function and intention. There is nothing to cause confusion. |
| RANGE | A wide range of language must be available to the candidate. Any specific items which cause difficulties can be smoothly substituted or avoided. | There must be only occasional obvious limitations on the range of language available. No allowances have to be made for the fact that the candidate is not a native-speaker. |
| FLEXIBILITY | There must be consistent evidence of the ability to 'turn-take' in a conversation and to adapt to new topics or changes of direction. | The candidate must be able to 'turn-take' and 'direct' an interaction appropriately and keep it flowing. |
| SIZE | Must be capable of making lengthy contributions where appropriate. Should be able to expand and develop ideas with minimal help from the interlocutor. | Must be capable of making lengthy and complex contributions as appropriate. The interlocutor does not need to support the candidate. |

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CHAPTER TWO

# THE CONCEPT OF 'DULY PERFORMED'

*Stella Marsh*

## Introduction

The assessment process involved in the Durham Graded Objectives Scheme was never intended to be a finely tuned measuring instrument which would sort and grade pupils or their performance. Therefore, the procedures were not designed to conform to statistical demands of validity and reliability in strict assessment terms. The main concern has been to influence what goes on in the classroom and the concept of 'bolt-on' tests was alien to the overall philosophy of the scheme. At the levels and for the purposes involved, the 'teacher's professional judgement' has been regarded as the ultimate determining factor. Nevertheless, paradoxically, a great deal of time and effort has had to be devoted to the issue of assessment, in order to establish a commonly accepted basis for the implementation of the principles involved.

## What are we trying to measure?

Tests, in the accepted sense, were rejected as a basis for measuring progress in our context. The aim was, as far as possible, to motivate pupils of a wide ability range, encouraging positive attitudes towards foreign language learning, whilst providing some evidence of progress through the course and some record of achievement. In a pilot project, objective tests had been used. Although many teachers felt 'comfortable' with this relatively standard approach to assessment, some colleagues were uneasy about the limitations on the format, especially in the light of the administrative demands made by its implementation on a wide scale, and, indeed, the potentially demotivating factors emerging from the somewhat arbitrary imposition of a 'pass' mark. Who could, with entire justification, claim that, for instance, '60' was 'alright', whereas

'59' was not? As an alternative, it was felt that there was a need to move towards a system of continuous assessment, with a considerable element of pupil involvement. If any kind of 'communication' was to be claimed as an essential aim, the process should record something more than the extent to which performance deviated from norms of accuracy in structure and vocabulary.

## *Cartes-Échelons*

For the first stage, *Niveau Fondamental* emerged - a system designed for 11 to 12-year-old pupils during the first eighteen months or two years of their study of French at school. Progress cards, or *Cartes-Échelons*, reflecting the rationale of the Scheme, are designed to be used throughout the teaching programme. Each provides short term objectives, reflects presentation, practice and production phases of learning for the functions, notions and situations concerned and makes some provision for revision and re-cycling of patterns covered. For pupils, the cards are intended to provide a tangible indication of progress through their programme of learning French, promoting the idea of building on success, whilst pointing out individual strengths and weaknesses. For teachers, the cards offer a guide to planning - the syllabus in tangible terms - an indication about necessary revision or re-teaching for individuals or the class as a whole, an aid for pair or group work, as well as forming the basis of the assessment process. The essential requirement was that any system devised should be as simple as possible to administer, for many reasons, including the issue of teacher sanity amid the ever increasing demands of the complex classroom scene.

## Underlying issues

Clearly, many complex issues are involved in determining the basis of any system of assessment procedures. Not least among these is to decide what is the difference between 'continuous assessment' and 'continual testing' - if indeed there is any - and whether it matters anyway. There is a concern that if one dares to sanction 'successful' performance, via a tick on a card, there is no guarantee that that proficiency will be retained by the pupil three hours, three days, three weeks or three months later. A justifiable concern! But are 'tests' any further guarantee of such retention? A move forward here seems to lie along the lines of recording achievement of similar tasks at various junctures over an extended period of time. This process is being introduced, on a limited basis, in *Niveau Moyen*, the second level of the Durham Scheme.

Another essential issue is to bear in mind the relationship between the parts and the whole, in the assessment of communicative competence, which, of course, involves more than linguistic competence *per se*. Traditionally, 'parts' were assessed largely via **written** material, selected by the teacher/examiner and (relatively) easy, cheap and quick to administer. There was a feeling of security, based on claims of reliability and validity in assessment terms. However, such a process excludes a substantial section of the whole ability range and, in addition, we do not necessarily know what a pupil **has** absorbed and **is capable of**. Any assessment of what we define as 'French', in terms of school programmes of learning, is very complex. Oral performance, for example, includes many elements and presents challenges in terms of time, money, equipment, organisation, ingenuity, invention and an understanding, probably greater than we actually have, of the foreign language learning process.

Yet, breaking this complex 'whole' down into 'bits' can be extremely unproductive. Utterances which 'pass' may well not add up to a coherent whole, any kind of total competence. For instance, in the oft quoted driving test analogy, successful driving requires more than the ability to perform a series of discrete manoeuvres. A collection of 'bits' may mean that we have not, in fact, at whatever stage, from single utterance to the whole programme, kept sight of the 'whole' to which we are aspiring - the bit at the front of the Syllabus document which everyone skips! Teachers, on the whole, were familiar with the concept of set 'tests' and it took a considerable amount of good faith on their part to abandon the well established compulsion to resort to tests as the inevitable proof that learning was taking and had taken place. It took a deal of effort and much discussion to reach a situation where users were convinced that a relatively imprecise system, such as that embodied in the *Cartes-Échelons* could be a more valid assessment process, in terms of the stage at which it was being used and of the purposes for which it was designed, than an ostensibly more 'reliable' system which was testing something which was less 'valid' in these terms. All this was, however, a necessary part of the 'acceptance' process and this apparent digression into the realms of theory is hopefully explained thereby.

## Towards criteria

The main purpose of this chapter is to explain how the *Cartes-Échelons*, briefly outlined above, are used within the Durham Scheme. The documentation for teachers states that the purpose of the *Cartes-Échelons* is to encourage 'assessment through teaching'. The *Niveau Fondamental* certificate will be awarded to pupils who 'successfully complete' all the (ten) *Cartes-Échelons.* It goes on to say that the guiding principle for the assessment will be 'Has the item been "duly performed" to the teacher's satisfaction?' This leads us into the minefield of issues concerning the definition and interpretation of criteria. What is 'completed'? What is 'right'? What is 'wrong'? What is 'acceptable'? What is 'duly performed'?

What does 'to the teacher's satisfaction' mean? Who is 'the' teacher and how easily is (s)he 'satisfied'? In order to define more closely our interpretation of this main criterion and to offer practical support to teachers, certain 'targets' have been established for guidance on the 'completion' of each card. Before these are explained in detail, it would be useful to consider the process which led to the elaboration of these criteria and targets.

In 1984, a paper recording the development of the Scheme outlined the need to establish a 'standardised view', amongst all users, about the meaning of 'duly performed'. The task of the development group was seen to be:

(i) DETERMINE THE CRITERIA AGAINST WHICH WE WISH TO MEASURE PERFORMANCE.

WE are (mainly) teachers of French as a foreign language. THE PERFORMERS are (mainly) twelve-year-old school learners. This has implications for the often invoked concepts of 'communicative competence' and 'native speaker' competence.

(ii) STANDARDISE OUR APPROACH TO THE CRITERIA, if necessary establishing some kind of 'grid' or system for measuring 'success' or 'achievement' ...'.

If such a system is to be successfully adopted, it is obviously necessary to build up a commonality of approach and expectations, which will underpin each individual teacher's professional judgment. This move towards the establishment of a commonly accepted basis for the interpretation and implementation of the principles involved has formed the essence of the developmental phase of the Scheme in action. It has involved, via support group meetings, considerable analysis of and discussion about 'acceptable performance' as a basis for sanctioning completion of the cards. Motivation, which we have striven to promote and sustain, would be shattered if, at the first encounter with a French speaker, the learner's performance proved totally wanting, extracting blank incomprehension. In other words, it would be irresponsible and indefensible to adopt a position where 'anything goes'. There has to be a point at which one says performance is not adequate but, hopefully, this will be in a context which, in most cases, admits the possibility of gradual improvement. The problem is to decide what shall be the yardstick.

Groups of teachers considered sample performances by a wide range of pupils. There was a predictably wide range of variation in tolerance of what was to be deemed 'acceptable'. An interesting phenomenon was that, often, our native French colleagues were easily able to accept examples which British members of the group, perhaps conditioned by our own 'traditional' approach to accepted performance in foreign language teaching terms, rejected. In certain instances, however, French colleagues admitted to being totally defeated by offerings, usually oral, which the English native speakers regarded as decipherable. In any case, an added element is that all these 'native speakers' were teachers of French in England and therefore, whether 'sympathetic' or not, accustomed to the intonations and the kinds of problems experienced by north easterners attempting to master French. We really were into the domain of 'rubber rulers measuring elastic'! However, by this kind of process, we moved gradually towards the elaboration of a common basis of expectation.

This background is important, as coming to grips with this sort of issue was necessary for the build up of confidence in the use of *Cartes-Échelons*. It is easy to forget, now, when introducing the scheme to 'new' users, that all this happened. The whole process of deliberation, elaboration, apprehension, misapprehension, has led to a position where the documentation now states:

> *The* Cartes-Échelons *should not be seen as tests to be used at the end of teaching units. They are intended to be used* **alongside** *the normal teaching programme, as and when pupils and teachers believe that particular items can be 'duly performed'. Teachers who try to 'test' every pupil on every item will find the Cards very time-consuming and an intrusion into their normal teaching programme. This practice is contrary to the whole basis of the Scheme...*

How does all this actually work in reality?

## Using the *Cartes-Échelons*

> *Some teachers show the cards to pupils at the beginning of a particular section of their teaching programme and then return them at appropriate points. Others make them available when they feel that most pupils will be able 'duly' to perform some of the items. Others leave the cards in boxes or envelopes, using an 'open access' system.*

Teachers new to the Scheme are still very relieved when they realise that the process does not require them to check or test every pupil on every item on every card! Indeed, they are expressly required **not** to do this. What should they do then? By and large, by means of the usual classroom processes, markbook records and homework procedures, teachers are aware of the overall capabilities of their pupils and therefore would be in a position to sanction a *Carte-Échelon*. In cases of doubt, it is suggested that specific attention should be given, as a check, in individual cases, to specific items on the Cards. Otherwise, cards can be sanctioned as 'duly performed' in accordance with the general 'targets' laid down.

During the developmental phase of the *Cartes-Échelons* (1984-85), teachers' attention was drawn to three stages involved in what might be regarded as a 'communicative approach' to foreign language teaching in schools:

1. Presentation: of new language items;
2. Practice: reinforcement activities;
3. Production: active use of the language, via tasks of various kinds.

It was assumed that the first two stages would be taught and checked, as usual, for example by vocabulary 'games' of various kinds, labelling, use of O.H.P. to fill in missing details, gapped texts, aural or written etc, etc. Records of these activities would be kept, as ever, in mark books and contribute their 'message' to the teacher awarding the final 'tick' on the *Carte-Échelon*. In order to assess the arguably more subjective elements of phase three, samples of pupil responses and outcomes were analysed, as outlined above. It was pointed out that:

> *It seems unrealistic, at a basic level, in an all-ability scheme, to insist on highly accurate native speaker competence. This may well involve, in many ways, a change in attitudes about what is acceptable in examinations in terms of high accuracy and fluency.* ***At this level,*** *the assessment criteria will not include 'formally accurate grammar, pronunciation and fluency'.*

To accompany the howls of protest and cries of *shame*! at this reckless abandonment of standards, it was pointed out that many of the tasks were demanding in ways not previously stressed and that, in any case, high(er) standards of accuracy in all respects ***should be developed in the teaching process and indeed expected of those who can***

***achieve them.*** *One's performance* ***can exceed*** *the minimum testing (sic) requirements.*

It had to be stressed that we were not assessing, via the *Cartes-Échelons*, an individual utterance, produced in a one-off test situation. For example, a response such as *Je m'appelle football* would be checked and re-assessed in the classroom situation. Similarly, *J'aime B.M.X-ing* would be developed as an example of beginning to rely on 'coping' strategies in order to communicate a message in French. It would be necessary, for example to spell B.M.X. in French and state something like *C'est fair du vélo* or even *C'est du vélo* or even *Vélo*. The notes include the comment, *'It would seem to be a potential advantage of the continuous assessment format that we do not have to attach "marks" to single utterances of the above kind'.* This is significant when viewed in the context of 'parts and whole' as discussed in Section 4. Persistent failure to communicate meaningfully, in the teacher's view, would be registered, as it were, by the absence of a tick on the card and on the teachers' Record sheet. Even if all pupils cannot achieve all the tasks set, it is hoped that everyone will have evidence that their compulsory attendance in French classes has had certain positive outcomes. Although principles such as this are now widespread, it was less easy at the time in question for their validity to be accepted. To return to the famous driving test analogy, some candidates who 'pass' are obviously barely safe on the road, whereas others are already very skilled, perhaps 'born' drivers. However, no distinctions are made at this stage. Subsequently, some will, probably literally, scrape through, whilst others will aspire to becoming 'advanced drivers'. The concept of differentiated outcome was not as widespread at the time and, in many ways, it seemed difficult to accept that a 'sanctioned' *Carte-Échelon*, despite its commonly accepted formula and rationale, should mean something 'different' in individual cases. However, this principle has remained and is now embodied in the notes on guidance for teachers.

In order to appreciate the workings of the scheme and its assessment principles, it is necessary to know about this background preparation. Even now, the notes for guidance of teachers operating the system are, in themselves, a kind of 'shorthand' embodying this collective experience. Indeed, in the author's view, therein lies the true value of the scheme in the context of curriculum development and in-service training.

Teachers currently using the scheme, then, have outline notes on the application and use of *Cartes-Échelons*. These include extracts such as:

> *The* Cartes-Échelons *should not be seen as tests, to be used at the end of teaching units. They are intended to be used alongside the normal teaching programme, as and when pupils and teachers believe that*

> *particular items can be 'duly performed'... The design of the cards is such that pupils are, to some extent, involved in their own assessment. It is therefore important that pupils should be trained to take the initiative in deciding whether they can 'successfully perform' an item or not. Pupils who consider themselves ready should tick the column P1.*

This in itself raises all kinds of issues. If, for example, teachers worry about their own capacity to act as arbiters of 'acceptable' performance, how can pupils' even more limited experience of the foreign language be regarded as a credible touchstone? To some extent, of course, this relates to the whole question of the involvement of learners in the assessment process. It is clearly necessary for pupils to be well aware of what they are expecting and expected to note. This can in fact give an added dimension to the process of learning and consolidation. Clearly, one is well aware of the implications of such issues as aural discrimination, the hearing deficiencies of learners, etc. However, at this stage, we need not carry things to extremes and we revert to the whole issue of keeping sight of our main purposes within the context of foreign language learning as a compulsory element of the curriculum in schools. Teachers' comments suggest that, by and large, pupils are very severe in their judgments about their own or a partner's performance. Some teachers have to persuade pupils quite hard that, in their view, a performance **is** indeed 'satisfactory' in the context. So, although the Scheme provides support for teachers in making assessments based on their professional judgment and experience, that is not the whole story.

For guidance, however, the following statements are offered:

> *The guiding principle for assessment of items on* Cartes-Échelons *will be:*
>
> ***'Has the item been duly performed to the teacher's satisfaction?'***
>
> *What is to be understood by '**Duly performed**'?*
>
> *Teachers should bear in mind that the pupil is an 11 to 13-year-old with limited experience of the (French) language. It would be unreasonable to expect a completely accurate performance, or the competence of a native speaker. Bearing this in mind, the teacher should take into consideration the context in which communication occurs and make allowance for minor errors of grammar or*

> *pronunciation which, in these circumstances, do not obscure the message.*
>
> *An activity would, therefore, be considered* 'duly performed' *if a message was passed, received and understood in a way which a teacher of French would deem understandable to a French-speaking person.*

Further notes are made concerning possible reactions/indications of understanding, in relation to the various skill areas, receptive and productive items. All the previously discussed factors of course apply. As a further guide to the meaning of 'duly performed' with regard to each *Carte-Échelon*, 'targets' have been specified in each case:

> *A recommended target for completion of these items will be given in the accompanying teachers' notes. The target will be in the region of 70-75%, depending on the level of difficulty of items on the card. This target will be subject to the teacher's discretion, (i.e. some professional judgment must be made about pupils who just 'fail' to meet the* ***target*** *but whose overall performance deserves to be rewarded).*
>
> *Completion of each card should be recognised as a positive achievement. 'Completion' of a card does not mean completion of every item. A card should be considered 'complete' if:*
>
> *(i) the target has been met;*
> *(ii) at least one item in the* Coffre d'Activités *has been successfully performed.*

The explanation of the *Coffre d'Activités* section of the cards reads:

> *It is recognised that the division of items into single skills is somewhat artificial and is usually done for the purposes of assessment. Multi-skill activities and activities involving the transfer of language already* ***presented*** *and* ***practised*** *into new* ***productive*** *situations are included in the section of the card marked* Coffre d'Activités. *The* Coffre d'Activités *will offer various suggestions for productive work and also space for teachers to add their own ideas. (As a basic minimum for assessment purposes), pupils are not expected to attempt* ***all*** *the items in the box but they are expected to have done* ***at least one***.

The *Cartes-Échelons* should provide pupils with a record of work successfully carried out. For this reason, it is important that a pupil should have easy access to his/her cards. Final certificates are awarded to all pupils who successfully 'complete', according to the above definition, all the ten *Cartes-Échelons*. For the purposes of the Scheme, teachers are required to keep a record of the *Cartes-Échelons* which have been satisfactorily completed by each pupil. Some use computer databases. A simple grid is provided with the documentation. This offers an easy to complete outline of how pupils are coping with each card. Such a record is designed to help teachers to:

- keep track of the cards completed;
- identify areas of weakness which, for an individual or the class as a whole, require remedial action;
- build up a 'linguistic profile'.

Two examples of grids are suggested. One, as used in some schools, provides an on-going individual profile for each pupil. It contains a record of the *Cartes-Échelons* completed and also space for termly comments on work and attitude. The other is a simple, 'whole class at a glance' page, outlining the various elements of the *Cartes-Échelons*. There are six columns for each card, including conventional headings of Vocabulary, Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing (where appropriate). The sixth column is headed 'A'. This is, conveniently, the initial letter of words such as 'attitude', 'aptitude', 'achievement', 'application', 'approach', 'attempt', 'awareness' and even 'awake'. In other words, it is there to attempt to capture that elusive something which cannot be encapsulated by any amount of discrete categories and performance statements, the element which in the end brings the act together and constitutes effective participation and communication, a vital ingredient of the 'whole' to which reference has previously been made.

Clearly, the input to the cards is currently now very appropriate in the context of Records of Achievement, and teachers who have persevered throughout the development process now feel that their efforts have earned some pay-off outside the actual foreign language classroom. Attitudes have varied. There has been irritation at the apparent necessity to fill in a mind-boggling number of ticks, a misconception which, hopefully has been scotched. There have been complaints that paper for the *Cartes* is not available. There has been a grudging admission that *'I've tried to resist the damned thing for years but now I've got to look at it again because the Head wants our proposals for Records of Achievement'*. One Head of Department vindicated the system by her assertion that *'If* Niveau Fondamental *did not exist, we'd now have to invent it.'*

## So, what do WE mean by 'It's wrong'?

The main issues involved in the completion of the *Cartes-Échelons* have been to move towards a situation where teachers participating in the Scheme share an awareness of the essential philosophy of this particular approach to curriculum development and assessment. They are intensely relieved when they realise that they are not required to tick every item on every card - in other words, that the cards are not meant to be tests as such. There comes a moment when certain levels of performance cannot be sanctioned as 'satisfactory' but all this is contained within a process which, as far as possible, attempts to deal with a wide range of ability and attitude and involves more than a one-off instantaneous judgment. In a sense, therefore, what is 'wrong' is registered by its non-inclusion on the card or grid. The cards are not intended to grade performance and register it as 'right' or 'wrong' but to record what elements can be deemed 'satisfactorily completed'. To this extent, they form a basis for a continuous process of assessment but the pressure of their serving as actual tests is removed. As indicated in this chapter, the issues involved in moving away from a traditionally accepted formula for assessment, based on recognition of linguistic accuracy or inaccuracy of form, are manifold. Criteria such as 'duly performed', 'satisfactory completion', 'in the teacher's judgment', may easily, in the final analysis, remain empty phrases, with no real meaning. However, the system outlined above, which is now being developed and modified for the new *Niveau Moyen*, retains our principles of assessment based on a continuous process of interaction within the classroom, incorporating involvement by the learner. It must stand or fall on the basis of its fitness for the purposes for which it was designed. Current evidence suggests that it does work.

*The ideas, as expressed in the above chapter, are the responsibility of the author. However, the work described has formed the basis of a major L.E.A. curriculum development project in County Durham. Due acknowledgement is accorded to the contributions, during the development of the Scheme, of:*

- *Mr A O Sheard (Modern Languages Adviser, Durham), and his predecessors, Mr R Geoghegan and Mr E Robson;*
- *six Teacher Fellows;*
- *teacher working groups and user support groups;*
- *Dr M S Byram and Dr R Gott, Durham University School of Education.*

## References

Brown, G et al (1984) *Teaching Talk*, Cambridge University Press.
Clough Engel, E and P Davis (1984) *Assessing Pupils*, NFER-Nelson.

Example of *Carte-Échelon*, followed by teachers' notes

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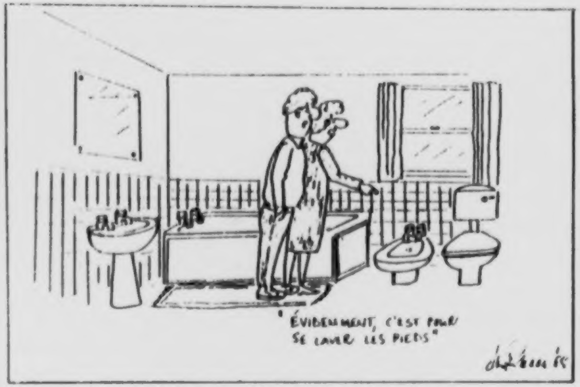
"ÉVIDEMMENT, C'EST POUR SE LAVER LES PIEDS"

CARTE BIEN ACCOMPLIE

PROFESSEUR: ________________

COLLÈGE: ________________

DATE: __________

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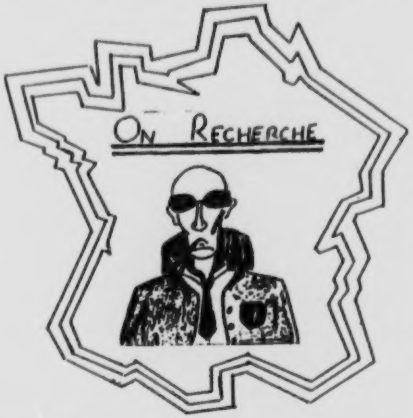
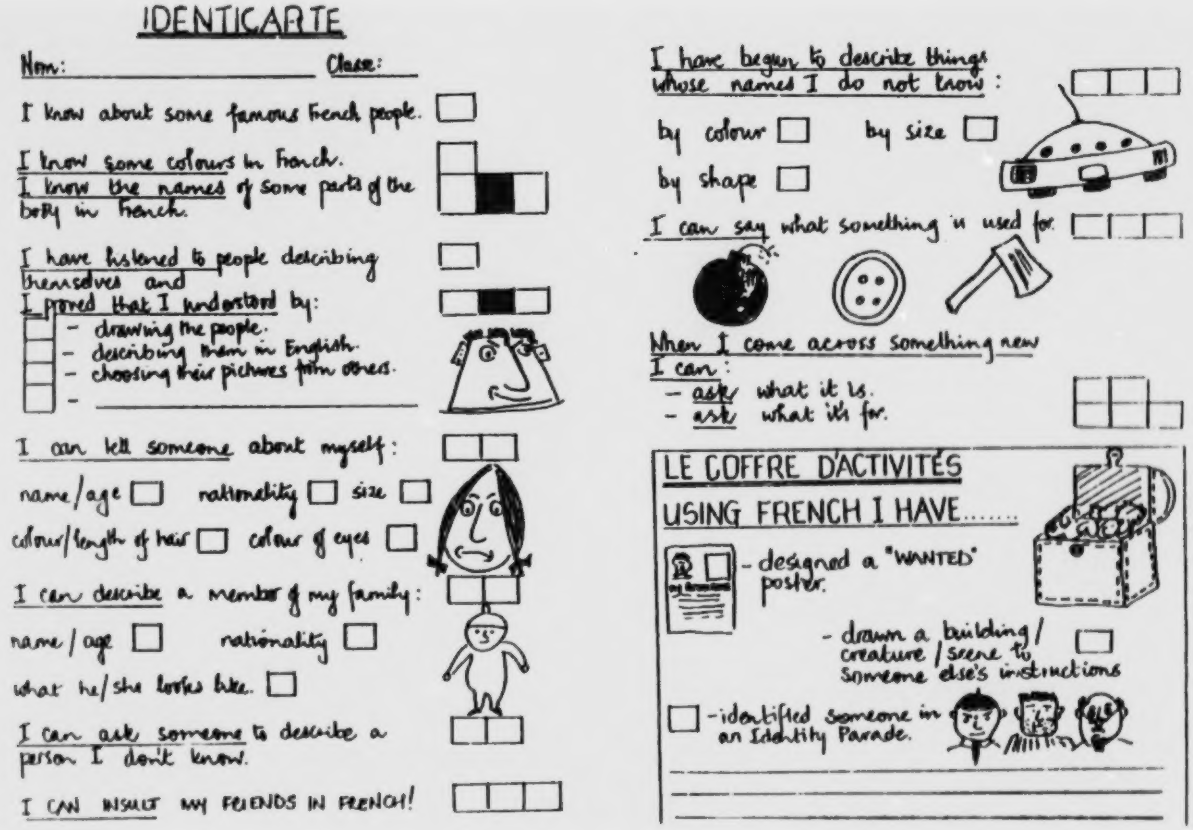
FRANÇAIS: NIVEAU FONDAMENTAL

# CARTE-ÉCHELON


ON RECHERCHE

# IDENTICARTE



IDENTICARTE

Nom: ______________ Classe: ______

I know about some famous French people. ☐

I know some colours in French. ☐

I know the names of some parts of the body in French. ☐■☐

I have listened to people describing themselves and ☐

I proved that I understood by: ☐■☐

☐ - drawing the people.
☐ - describing them in English.
☐ - choosing their pictures from others.
☐ - ______________

I can tell someone about myself: ☐☐

name/age ☐ nationality ☐ size ☐

colour/length of hair ☐ colour of eyes ☐

I can describe a member of my family: ☐☐

name / age ☐ nationality ☐

what he/she looks like. ☐

I can ask someone to describe a person I don't know. ☐☐

I CAN INSULT MY FRIENDS IN FRENCH! ☐☐☐

31

I have begun to describe things whose names I do not know: ☐☐☐

by colour ☐ by size ☐

by shape ☐

I can say what something is used for. ☐☐☐

When I come across something new I can:
- ask what it is.
- ask what it's for.

☐☐☐

LE COFFRE D'ACTIVITÉS

USING FRENCH I HAVE……

☐ - designed a "WANTED" poster.

- drawn a building/creature/scene to someone else's instructions ☐

☐ - identified someone in an Identity Parade.

32

F1

*IDENTICARTE* 9 ITEMS (70%)

SYLLABUS DOCUMENT REFERENCES

| SYLLABUS OUTLINE | VOCABULARY | STRUCTURE |
|---|---|---|
| I TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE<br>C. Asking/giving information about:<br>i) name;<br>ii) age;<br>iii) nationality;<br>v) family, friends.<br>IV<br>ASKING FOR/GIVING INFORMATION<br>A. Enquiring/stating who/what people/things are:<br>i) by category;<br>ii) by role.<br>IV<br>B. DISCUSSING WHAT PEOPLE/THINGS LOOK LIKE<br>i) dress;<br>ii) sizes;<br>iii) colour;<br>iv) shape.<br>VIII USING COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES<br>B. Coping with the unknown. | Section 1<br>Nationalities<br>Section 8<br>The body<br>Section 9<br>Adjectives<br>Section 10<br>Clothes<br>Section 20<br>Communicative phrases | Section 3 Adjectives<br>a) Regular<br>b) Preceding<br>c) Irregular<br>Section 6 Verbs<br>b) *S'appeler.*<br>c) *Avoir* + description<br>*Avoir* + age<br>d) *Être.*<br>e) *Faire.*<br>g) Verbs + infinitive<br>Section 7 Questions<br>f) *Que (Qu'est-ce que ...?*<br>g) *Comment?* |

## INTRODUCTION

This Card is about describing people and things. Included is an introduction to strategies for talking about things whose names are unknown. Teachers may wish to deal with these two areas on separate occasions and so description of people is to be found on the left-hand page. The *COFFRE D'ACTIVITÉS* reflects both items. This Card is weighted more towards PRODUCTIVE language than other cards. This has been reflected in the slightly lower target mark for completion of the Card.

**F2**

**GENERAL**

**I know some famous French people**

Most course books supply such material. This might be the basis for a research homework, project or classroom display.

**I know some colours...**

*Blanc, bleu, brun, gris, jaune, noir, rouge, vert.*

**I know the names of some parts of the body**

Enough for the purposes of describing people/creatures. A basic list is provided in Section 8 of the syllabus vocabulary.

A quick burst of *Alouette* might well include all that is needed.

**RECEPTIVE**

**I have listened to people ...**

This might be the teacher, another pupil or a tape.

**I ... that I understood ...**

Different ways of showing comprehension are outlined on the sheet (with a space left for other ideas!). Pupils should tick one or more boxes, as appropriate.

This work could be done on paper and checked by the teacher before tackling the Card.

**PRODUCTIVE**

**I can tell someone about myself**

Pupils will need to use the *Je* forms of *s'appeler/avoir/être.*

For the purposes of the scheme, adjectival agreement is a matter of **discrimination by sound only**. (Schools may wish, of course, to deal with the written forms as well.)

**I can describe a member of my family**

The principles are the same as those outlined above, but by using third person forms.

**I can ask someone to describe a person ...**

*Il/Elle est comment ...?*

**I can insult my friends!**

An interesting way of practising *tu* forms (and *vous*, if the teacher is insulted!)

F3

**I have begun to describe things ...**

It should be emphasised that this is only the beginning of a very useful 'coping strategy'. Unusual items might be described by:

1. Category (*C'est un objet/animal/monstre*).

2. Shape/size/colour.

**I can say what something is used for**

*C'est pour ...*

(N.B. The bomb, button, axe are for illustrative purposes only. Teachers should choose items which are within the language capabilities of their pupils.)

**When I come across something new ...**

Further examples of communicative strategies to cope with the unknown.

*LE COFFRE D'ACTIVITÉS*

**- designed a 'wanted' poster**

Pupils might hear/read a description of a robber/murderer. They have to draw his/her face onto the 'WANTED' poster.

More able pupils might draw the poster and write their own descriptions.

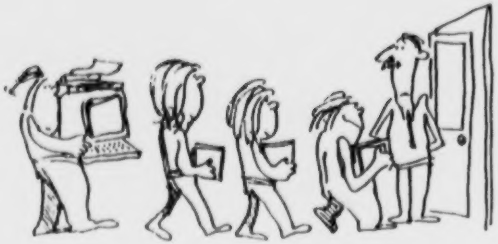
**- drawn a building/creature/scene**

One pupil describes an item (colour/shape/size/position/etc) and the other must draw and colour the same item.

**- identified someone in an identity parade**

Pupils might be asked to select the criminal from a series of pictures/cuttings/photos. A development of this might be for pupils to dress up and the 'criminal' be identified amongst them.

Example of *Carte-Échelon*, followed by teachers' notes



### CARTE BIEN ACCOMPLIE

PROFESSEUR: ____________

COLLÈGE: ____________

DATE: ______ ______

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FRANÇAIS: NIVEAU FONDAMENTAL

# CARTE–ÉCHELON

# EN CLASSE

# EN CLASSE

NOM : ____________________ CLASSE: __________

| P1 | P2 | T |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ | ■ | ☐ |
| ☐ | ■ | ☐ |
| ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

I listen to and try to understand the French that I hear.
I try to speak in French whenever I can.
I have started to speak in French with another pupil.

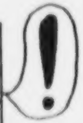
I know the names of some things in the classroom. ☐

I can read and understand some of the signs and notices in the classroom. ☐

ICI ON PARLE FRANÇAIS

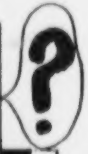
I understand simple instructions from my teacher:
- to repeat what he/she has said.
- to put up my hand.
- to listen.
- to hand out/collect in books.
- ..............................................
- ..............................................

☐ ■ ☐



I understand when the teacher asks:
- if everything is alright.
- if we are ready.
- if we have finished.
- if we have understood.
- ..............................................
- ..............................................

☐ ■ ☐



I understand when:
- Someone asks me where something is.
- Someone tells me where something is in the classroom.

☐ ☐ ☐

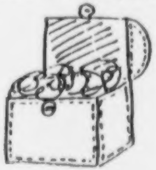
I can say:
- who is absent from the class.
- that I don't understand.
- "please" and "thank you."

☐ ■ ☐

I can say where things are in the classroom. ☐ ☐ ☐

I can ask where things are. ☐ ☐ ☐

## LE COFFRE D'ACTIVITÉS



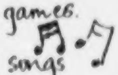
### I CAN USE FRENCH TO.......

- politely attract the teacher's attention ☐
- borrow something from someone in my class ☐

### WE HAVE USED FRENCH TO.......

☐ play games. ☐ hold competitions

☐ sing songs ☐ do the register.



..............................................
..............................................
..............................................

C1

*EN CLASSE* 18 ITEMS (75%)

**SYLLABUS DOCUMENT REFERENCES**

| SYLLABUS OUTLINE | VOCABULARY | STRUCTURE |
|---|---|---|
| IV ASKING FOR/GIVING INFORMATION<br>A. ASKING/STATING WHO OR WHAT PEOPLE /THINGS ARE<br>C. DISCUSSING WHERE PEOPLE OR THINGS ARE. | SECTION 7<br>CLASSROOM OBJECTS | SECTION 6<br>6 c) *IL Y A*<br>d) *ÊTRE* + SITUATION<br>i) *COMPRENDRE*<br>k) IMPERATIVES |
| VI UNDERSTANDING/GIVING INSTRUCTIONS | CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT SECTION OF THE SYLLABUS DOCUMENT | SECTION 2<br>PREPOSITIONS<br>*sur, sous, dans, devant, derrière.* |
| VIII USING COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES | SECTION 20<br>COMMUNICATIVE PHRASES | |

***INTRODUCTION**

This Card has two purposes:

1. To focus on the importance of 'Classroom Management' in developing 'communicative competence'.

2. To allow pupils to talk about their immediate surroundings/needs i.e. 'relevant' in **their** terms.

   A guide to Classroom Management phrases is in the Syllabus document. No doubt, these will be introduced gradually by the teacher. The items selected for the Card reflect those items which may be introduced relatively early and require either a non-verbal response or simply *Oui/Non*. Space has been left for additional items to be used as and when appropriate.

   **It should be stressed that this Card, like all the Cards, is designed to be used alongside the teaching programme. Items should be ticked as and when they are introduced and used.**

***GENERAL**

**I listen/I try to speak/I have started to speak**

These items are introduced to emphasise to pupils the importance of oral/aural/pair work in the Scheme.

### C2

### I know the names of some things in the classroom

The Syllabus Vocabulary suggests about eighteen items. Pupils should be able to name/recognise at least ten of these. There is, of course, no need for pupils to write/spell these words to meet the demands of this item.

***RECEPTIVE**

**I can read and understand...**

Signs and notices in the classroom (corridor/school) have an important part to play in establishing a 'communicative atmosphere.' Suggestions for signs are given in the Management Section of the Syllabus document. Notices with visual clues would help comprehension at first. The clues might be removed at a later stage.

**I understand simple instructions...**

Simple imperatives or expressions with *vouloir* requiring an action as a response are envisaged here. Additional space is available for *Asseyez-vous; Entrez; Regardez le tableau;* etc.

**I understand when the teacher asks ...**

These are simple questions requiring the reply *Oui/Non*. To these could be added *C'est difficile/facile? C'est vrai/faux? Peter est absent?*

**I understand when:**
**Someone asks me where/tells me where...**

Simple prepositions are usually and most easily taught by reference to classroom objects. *SUR, SOUS, DANS, DEVANT, DERRIÈRE* would be the most appropriate to introduce at this stage. They might be used with *EST/SONT* or *IL Y A*.

Pupils would show comprehension by drawing or placing objects in particular places. The emphasis here is on listening comprehension.

***PRODUCTIVE**

**I can say:**
**Who is absent**

*Absent/absente* provides simple practice of the sound changes of adjectival agreement, which will feature in other parts of the Scheme (in particular, *IDENTICARTE*).

**That I don't understand**

*Je ne comprends pas* is a vital phrase in the 'communicative classroom'. It stops the teacher from talking at a level above that of pupils. It is also a valuable phrase for 'coping' and as such re-appears in other Cards.

## C3

### 'Please' and 'Thank You'

### I can say where things are

The prepositions outlined above should be used here and possibly *Il/Elle est ...* , *Ils/Elles sont ...* or *Il y a ...*

Pupils could, of course, demonstrate their ability to use the pronouns without using full sentences.

*Où est le stylo? SUR LA TABLE.*

### I can ask where things are

*Où est/sont ...?* or possiblv
*Il y a un stylo sur la table, monsieur?*

### **COFFRE D'ACTIVITÉS*

Again pupils ought to be able to tick several boxes.

### Politely attract attention/Borrow an item

These are simple transactions in the classroom. They may be attempted at different levels of language from *Madame*, s.v.p to *Excusez-moi, madame* or *Un stylo, s.v.p., monsieur* to *Voulez-vous me prêter un stylo?*

### We have used French to ...

Pupils may be able to tick some or all of these items depending upon the classroom activities they experience.

### 4.1 RECORDS

For the purposes of the Scheme, a **record** must be kept of the *Cartes-Échelons* which have been satisfactorily completed.

However, the Scheme provides both pupil and teacher with a means of recording progress.

### 4.2 PUPIL RECORDS

The *Cartes-Échelons* should provide the pupil with a record of work and success. For this reason, it is important that a pupil has easy access to his/her Cards.

### 4.3 TEACHER RECORDS

The *Cartes-Échelons* provide the means of charting the progress and work of pupils. A simple grid will provide an easy-to-complete outline of how pupils are coping with each Card. Such a record would help teachers to:

- keep track of the number of Cards completed;
- identify areas of weakness, requiring 'remedial action', either for individuals or the class as a whole;
- build up a 'linguistic profile' (for use in reporting, GCSE, etc).

4.4 Two examples of grids/profiles are suggested:

#### EXAMPLE 1

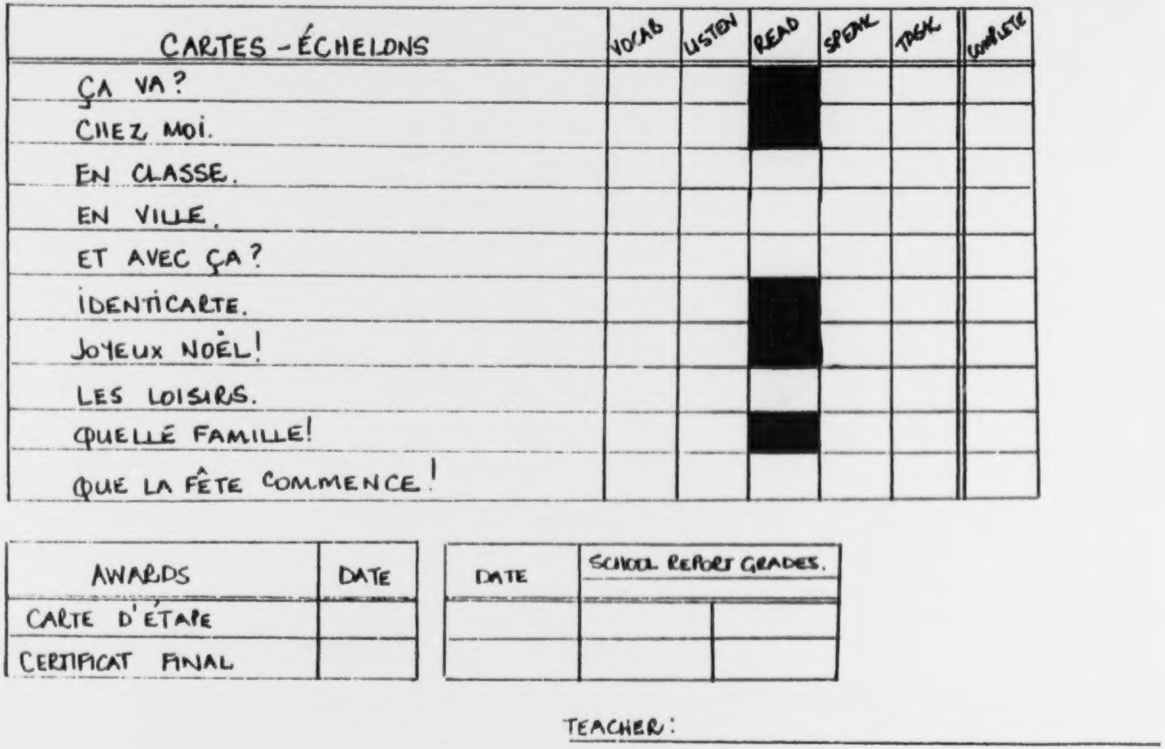
A simple 'whole class' grid, outlining the various elements of the *Cartes-Échelons* and pupil participation.

V = Vocabulary
L = Listening
R = Reading
S = Speaking
W = Writing (if appropriate)
A = Attitude/aptitude/achievement

#### EXAMPLE 2

An on-going 'individual' profile, containing a record of work with the *Cartes-Échelons*, (i.e. the grid) **and also** space for termly comment on work and attitude.

Durham Scheme
Suggestions to teachers on record keeping



| CARTES - ÉCHELONS | VOCAB | LISTEN | READ | SPEAK | TASK | COMPLETE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ÇA VA? | | | ■ | | | |
| CHEZ MOI. | | | ■ | | | |
| EN CLASSE. | | | | | | |
| EN VILLE. | | | | | | |
| ET AVEC ÇA? | | | | | | |
| IDENTICARTE. | | | ■ | | | |
| JOYEUX NOËL! | | | ■ | | | |
| LES LOISIRS. | | | | | | |
| QUELLE FAMILLE! | | | ■ | | | |
| QUE LA FÊTE COMMENCE! | | | | | | |

| AWARDS | DATE |
|---|---|
| CARTE D'ÉTAPE | |
| CERTIFICAT FINAL | |

| DATE | SCHOOL REPORT GRADES. | |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |

TEACHER: ____________________

Durham Scheme
Individual *Carte-Échelon* record

Durham Scheme
Grid Example 1

| | Group: | Card: | | | | | | Card: | | | | | | Card: | | | | | | Card: | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | NAME | V | L | S | R | W | A | V | L | S | R | W | A | V | L | S | R | W | A | V | L | S | R | W | A |
| 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 13 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 14 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 16 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 17 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 19 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 21 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 22 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 23 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 24 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 25 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 26 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 27 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 28 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 29 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 30 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 31 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 32 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 33 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 34 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 35 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Durham Scheme
Grid Example 2

***FRANÇAIS: NIVEAU FONDAMENTAL*** **STUDENT PROFILE FORM**

**STUDENT'S NAME:**

**FORM:** **YEAR: 198 /8**

| | Date | Oral/aural skills | Reading/(writing) skills | Cooperative skills (participation - pair work - groups - games) | General comments (homework - presentation - penfriends - exchanges etc.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TERM ONE | | | | | |
| TERM TWO | | | | | |
| TERM THREE | | | | | |

## CHAPTER THREE

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# THE MANY SORTS OF ERROR

*Richard Beaton*

There is some significance in the fact that the writer of an article dealing with error in foreign language acquisition has ended up dealing almost exclusively with errors in productive language skills, and in speaking in particular. Mistakes in reading, writing or listening can have no less dire (or amusing) consequences. This may be due to the high value we now place upon the ability to speak in a foreign language, but it is also because speaking is the medium in which other people (read 'teacher', 'pair-work partner') most immediately and vividly perceive mistakes.

Just as a theologian might determine various stages through which the sinner has to pass in order to be saved, so the conscientious language teacher could work out the linguistic equivalents of recognition, contrition, expiation, atonement and absolution for errors in a foreign language, though like M. Jourdain's prose, they are likely to be doing a great deal of it without realising it.

A taxonomy of error correction might include:

The wish to detect error;
The recognition of error;
The formulation of a particular strategy for dealing with error;
The (first) correction of error; and
The verification of improvement.

... the difference being that in the process of teaching, the middle three stages at least are likely to occur simultaneously. The antecedent is of course some working definition of error.

However necessary errors are in the process of learning another language, the nub of the challenge currently is that in the context of communicative language teaching, with its emphasis on understanding performance rather than examining competence, we can no longer focus mainly upon the grammatical inaccuracy we were all used to pinpointing. (The extension of language teaching to the whole ability range makes it doubly vital that we look at this question of error.)

To put it another way: *'How do I as a teacher know (now) when a student has expressed himself incorrectly in the foreign language, and what is the process of correction which leads to improvement?'* (i.e. leaving aside errors of content). Teachers have had to put grammatical errors in a new context, and concentrate on the broader task of assessment. Error correction has an altered status, since the communicative philosophy now permeating language teaching encourages us

i. **not** to look primarily at single errors, but rather to make global judgements; and

ii. to assess what a pupil has got across, rather than what they have failed to do.

The danger of course is that error correction might be swept somewhat under the carpet with this approach. What usually happens is that we all agree on trivial, obvious errors in morphology[1]. It leaves a large area of ambiguity and uncertainty. Hecht remarks (Hecht, 1987, p.107) that even when teachers know they have heard a mistake, they find it very difficult to say *how much* communication has taken place. However intriguing this might be, it is really only a problem if assessment is based on some notion of the *quantity* of communication in any utterance, because it implies that you can somehow give a numerical value to degrees of error.

## Errors in different dimensions

If we focus on the *teaching*, however, there may well be different strategies to adopt according to the type of error which is noticed, though the distinctions made by the teacher in the classroom may not be the same or as fine as those made by the course-writer or theoretician.

Unfortunately, errors in a 'communicative' context are not quite as precisely definable as grammatical errors. Here a fairly loose but useful distinction will be made between competence and performance, meaning the difference between what pupils know about a language and what they do with it. One description of error, then, could be 'a failure in performance.' Assuming that performance is related to, and dependent upon competence in some way, Hecht (op. cit. p.100) quotes Lyons on the sort of competence(s) needed to interact orally:

> ***First***, *we use language in interaction to do something with the language ..... the instrumental function of language.*
>
> ***Secondly***, *we use language to report or describe.*
>
> ***Thirdly***, *we use language to establish social relationships. There is a social function of language ....*
>
> *And* ***finally***, *we used language to create or re-create the world. We use it to expand our world. In other words, there is the poetic function of language.*

Most of these categories could provide the teacher with a useful framework for dealing with error. 'Most' because the poetic function differs in not being subject to the same sort of openly accessible criteria of 'rightness' and 'wrongness' as the others.

## What to do about errors

Prevention is obviously better than cure, but while the task, vocabulary, structures to use and so on will be made as clear as possible to the pupils in preparation, the teacher has to avoid killing the topic.

What the teacher **does** about error will depend on at least three things:

1. The level of the students, which involves some notion of the use they can make of corrections.

With younger or less able pupils, detailed corrections, or corrections to specific points of grammar may be quite pointless: they simply will not understand a correction in the form of an explanation. As Peter Green[1] observes, even more able pupils will often repeat a correct paradigm when their error is pointed out, and proceed to make exactly the same mistake again when in the full flight of communicating. What this might imply is that often, correction in the form of an explanation is not the best anyway; the 'correction' which relies on the teacher responding, with the correct form, to the **content** of the students' speech is more likely to bear fruit in the long run.

Similarly, even with a more experienced or able group, constant error correction may be inhibiting to the more important aim of fluency. Roughly speaking we are concerned that pupils preparing for the 'Higher' level GCSE should be as grammatically correct as possible in both speech and writing, and that where 'Basic' pupils cannot consistently achieve the more conventional grammatical accuracy, they should be as 'communicative' as possible. As is so often the case, a combination of the two approaches (and not necessarily at the same time) would seem to be the best. One obvious way to do this, and it can be done with errors in any of the traditional 'four skills' is to make a note of any errors which occur more than once in a class and go over them after the communicative exchange, thus avoiding drawing attention to particular individuals.

2. What the teacher is trying to achieve in that particular sequence of teaching or language activity.

Monitoring for accuracy and fluency in one operation is something that oral examiners have been doing for some time, even though the two are marked separately. It might be less easy in the course of a busy lesson, but one group activity for three students that can involve the whole class in a constructive way is to set up a role-play or conversation between students A and B, while student C scans the dialogue for the use of certain phrases, or the omission of certain words and so on. A fourth student could listen for other features.

3. The teacher-pupil ratio operating in the room at that time and whether pair-work, or group work is in progress.

It is almost a truism that teacher-pupil ratios determine the incidence of teacher/pupil interaction. A teacher may correct an error at great length with a group of 18 pupils, and hardly at all with a class of 34.

Assuming therefore that errors have to be corrected, there is one large practical problem with the traditional 1:1, teacher-pupil method. In many a classroom, communicative language activities involve a lot of movement, noise and activity: the move away from teacher-centred learning means that traditional formulae for error correction simply cannot be applied in many cases. It is also undesirable for another reason.

> *Nothing is more calculated to slow the pace of a lesson and discourage willingness to offer answers than a question asked of a single pupil, followed immediately (after confirmation or correction) by a new question asked of another single pupil .... (Green p 6)*

Pairwork can in fact bring the advantage that it allows a more rapid *and private* intervention by the teacher which avoids painful public repetitions. It is highly unlikely that most language teachers consciously divide pupil errors into neat categories and devise different strategies in the bustle of a lesson.

Conversations with practising teachers revealed that they do not deal with errors according to types or category in any rigorous way. Indeed the dominant impression is that they often gear their strategies more to the pupil involved: their expertise lies in the way they lead and encourage the learner rather than in precise diagnosis of the error. The result was that even when questioned about how they recognised and corrected error from a linguistic point of view, what came over most strongly was their relationship with the individual pupil. The most frequent types of corrections are:

i. Incorporating the 'correct' form in a naturalistic response:

   P: *J'ai allé en ville hier ....*
   T: *Ah oui, moi je suis allé en ville ce matin.*

ii. Feigning incomprehension until the error is recognised and auto-corrected.

iii. Using the foreign assistant in class to go round and help individuals quietly in a way calculated not to draw attention.

iv. Using the language laboratory 'intercom' for correcting errors privately, on a 1:1 basis.

v. Using tact and humour on every possible occasion, especially in groups. Exaggerating the error to the point of comedy works well with younger groups.

vi. Trying when possible to vary the style of explanations or pointing out of errors. Sit down with a group and work it out. Give pairs of pupils a clue and see if they can arrive at a solution.

vii. Make it creditable to ask for clarifications and ask about errors: make it clear that it is part of the learning.

## GRAMMATICAL ERRORS

When errors are corrected, it goes without saying that revision of the correction is essential. Learning a language is not just the acquisition of a technique at one point in time, it is about the retention of that technique/skill over a period of time. As Green[1] puts it, there needs to be an incubation period in which the learner acquires a feel for the rule. This is more likely to come from meaningful communication than from pattern drills. (See also the excellent INSET notes which accompany the BBC programme 'The Communicative Classroom', filmed at the Lord Grey school, and written by Peter Green).

### FAILURES IN 'SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE'

This is likely to be indicated by a learner using an inappropriate language 'function', or (for example) adopting a very familiar stance in a socially formal situation. This is an example of an error which might be corrected through the humour of exaggerating the effects of the 'mistake' in some sort of dramatic sketch.

### FAILURES IN 'STRATEGIC COMPETENCE'

This is likely to be indicated by a total breakdown in communication, because the learner has not (yet) got sufficient alternative means of expression at his or her disposal, or insufficient repair strategies. This might be a moment to ask everyone in the room to stop for a little more practice of the structures required.

### ERRORS IN THE INSTRUMENTAL FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE

With these errors, the teacher will judge that the learner would have been unlikely to obtain what they wanted in transactional terms, but it could stem from a wide variety of errors: errors of lexis, pronunciation, register and so on. The foreign assistant would be invaluable here, judging whether or not the pupil would have succeeded in a 'real' situation.

### ERRORS IN THE DESCRIPTIVE FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE

With these errors, there is more likely to be a one-to-one comparison by the teacher between what the student says and something independently verifiable. It must have been part of the reasoning behind the 'picture description' type of test in language examinations. A good type of language activity here would be anything to do with 'minimal pair differences', e.g.: cut out pictures of very similar clothes or toys from a catalogue, and get pupils to identify and describe them.

Any activity, however simple, which entails the pupil following or issuing instructions in the foreign language will enable the desired outcome to be verifiable (since there is usually a point to instructions!).

It is an argument for adopting a task-based approach in language teaching.

ERRORS IN THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE

These will be noticed mainly by the teacher placing themselves in the role of the sympathetic native listener and judging whether or not they would have said or expected to hear the same thing. It is also the point perhaps at which video could be used to observe and learn a little bit about non-verbal communication: facial expression, gestures, body language and so on.

## Paralinguistic features

One of the most interesting doors opened by continuous oral assessment is the opportunity to assess communication by non-verbal means. According to Kristine Fitch (Fitch, 1986). 'Non-verbal and paralinguistic cues together account for 55-65% of the meaning of spoken messages'. If this is true, it is an inordinately large proportion of the activity of communication which is neither taught nor assessed, and ways should be explored of including some aspects of this. Talking about assessing discussions, Underhill (Underhill 1987, p 45) says:

> *Tone of voice, pitch and intonation, and expression of face and body language all contribute to this negotiation.*

Teachers marking role plays in graded testing only have to think how often they have given full marks reluctantly in the oral component when the spoken content of a student's performance has been at total variance with demeanour, comportment, attitude, expression, and so on. The interesting question therefore is 'can we detect and correct errors in non-verbal communication?'

When doing this, it would be important to keep in mind the distinction between native speaker and foreign language learner competence. Look for example at Pattison's list of authentic dialogue features:

> *Meaning is conveyed by any means at the speaker's command: linguistic or paralinguistic (gestures etc). (p 8)*

Widdowson is quite clear that this is a valid part of communication:

> *Communication through the spoken mode is not realised by speaking,*

> *but by saying, which employs such paralinguistic devices as gesture, facial expression, and so on, which are conveyed through the visual medium. (p 73)*

... so if it is there and conveys meaning, a learner can make an error in communication which does not involve speaking, and these errors can be corrected.

In graded objectives schemes procedures for error correction are rarely (if ever) laid down at this level of detail. The usual dictum (at least in the North Yorkshire graded objectives schemes) has been that errors of any sort, whether syntactic, grammatical, of pronunciation, or whatever, are only noted in as far as they adversely affect communication. Detailed error detection and correction has not taken place nor been recommended within these schemes: if the task is judged to have been successfully completed, then the errors were not of sufficient magnitude as to inhibit communication.

## Continuous assessment

Error correction is not the same as assessment, but a scheme of continuous assessment can put a **slightly** different perspective on the whole issue for two reasons:

i. In continuous assessment (of oral skills for example) a broader view of communication is taken, which goes beyond speaking. It may well include such aspects as attitude and contribution to proceedings.

ii. By the nature of the increased group and pair-work, errors might well have to be corrected less frequently, and more fleetingly for one major reason: the volume (which hopefully means fluency and pace) of oral exchange between pupils is felt to be worth sustaining at the expense of frequent interruptions by the teacher.

The pupil may be left to practise a correct (or more appropriate) form with his or her partner while the teacher moves on. Broadly speaking however, continuous assessment will not have a radical effect on error correction.

## Peer assessment

Many graded objectives schemes now contain some form of continuous assessment by pupil progress card which involves pairs of pupils assessing each other. It would be more accurate to call this 'peer monitoring', for in the schemes operating in North Yorkshire at least, pupil A merely has to say whether or not he thinks pupil B has communicated, and it is their perception of error which will cause them to reject a partner's performance.

The verification of this, and any assessment of performance, is done by the teacher. It is well known that pupils (or students) are often harder on their peers in monitoring exercises than their teachers. This can be turned to good use by the teacher (sensitively) pooling, and dealing with, errors noticed by the pupils in their partners. At its simplest, learning what to do (as with most skills) also includes learning what not to do.

Peer monitoring is of course open to the problem of pupil A simply becoming accustomed to, and accepting, the errors of pupil B. One answer to that is to ensure that pupils swap partners fairly frequently. Teachers are not immune to this problem either: familiarity with a pupil will often provide understanding of an utterance which another would find incomprehensible. This may be saying no more than that the perception of error is a subjective matter, but it is vital when it comes to the question of reliability, and must not be forgotten. In addition there is the fascinating area of differing perceptions of error between native and non-native speakers. Green and Hecht write illuminatingly about this.

## Where do we go from here?

There is no doubt that all language teachers will benefit from reassessing their ideas about error and their methods for dealing with it. So thoroughly has the message about the learner being a foreign learner and not a native speaker been absorbed, that many of us now find it quite acceptable to hear strong residual interference from the mother tongue at even high levels of performance.

The present writer well remembers meeting a member of the English department in a French university whose 'errors' in English were so subtle that they intrigued and long eluded analysis until it was realised that in fact he was speaking with such a perfect command of grammar and 'r.p.' that it was **totally** unnatural! There's a moral there somewhere.

## Footnotes

[1] Quoted from a conversation with Peter Green, University of York.

## Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER FOUR

# LEARNER AUTONOMY

*Rosemary Olivier*

## Introduction

In considering the nature of error in language teaching today, I have drawn together strands from my own experience. All of these have influenced my view of 'right' and 'wrong' in language work today. The work I do in the classroom with students from ages thirteen to nineteen is based on my wish to encourage the optimistic use of language.

It is also crucially important to me to allow my students to feel a sense of achievement which will encourage them to pursue their work with enthusiasm. Therefore, the time I have spent on assessment in languages is inter-related with the development of profiling and records of achievement across all subject areas.

I have traced these influences on my thinking, initially, before dealing in more detail with the areas which relate specifically to language learning.

## Reports

Teachers have generally been used to writing reports, which are sent to parents at intervals. These have usually commented on a pupil's work and sometimes had grades for effort or attainment or achievement. Some schools have used booklets, some separate sheets of paper or NCR paper. There was no guarantee that formats would be similar in two schools in the same town, even if schools appeared to be paired, or if one fed children to another.

The language of reports has often been a mystery, too. It can be difficult to determine what 'Satisfactory work' means; especially if two children of widely varied ability in the same class receive the same comment. There is a temptation, too, to use reports to get back at difficult and disruptive pupils. Some comments, therefore, may reflect conflicts between teacher and pupil which have never been aired before.

During my five years as head of year, I dealt with the issue of reports to parents twice a year. Each student in the year group studied fourteen different subjects. There was a written report on each one. Grades were given for the effort and attainment. Sometimes the teacher's comment did not seem to relate to the grades given; for example, a low grade for effort with the comment 'Always works hard' didn't make much sense.

I read every report written for every child in my year group and wrote my own comments, but it was sometimes difficult to identify what the child had been doing over the reporting period. I frequently felt that I knew nothing more about the child for all the words recorded. I began to ask myself why we were undertaking this time-consuming activity.

Reports which were helpful, however, were extremely welcome. These described in detail what the child had done, gave praise where it was due, and advice on how to improve future performance. For example, it might say:

> *Claire used her time on the exchange visit to improve her listening skills. She needs to spend time practising her oral work - perhaps by exchanging tapes with her penfriend?*

What about the child's point of view in all this activity? Some few were terrified of their reports going home and became very anxious. Some more were mystified and had no idea what their reports would say. Many teachers, when questioned, agreed that they wrote their reports without reference to their mark books. We could ask why teachers spend time marking work when they do nothing with the marks. There was, clearly, no direct feedback to students about their progress over the course.

It becomes increasingly evident that the whole assessment process needs to be integrated to the work in class and the guidance of students in their studies.

## Profiles and Records of Achievement

This is now materialising with the developments in profiling and records of achievement. Many schools have reviewed their policies and planned their marking so that the student, the teacher and the parent are all aware of what is expected and of whether the expectations have been met. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on what they have learnt and, more importantly, how they learnt it, and to decide what they should do to improve in areas of weakness.

Joint Reviews with tutors and teachers allow students the opportunity to identify their strengths and to target future developments.

Achievement is a key word to reflect on. We focus on the **individual** child's knowledge and learning, without reference to others', and we convey that attainment as it stands without value judgments. We assess the child where she is, not at the average for the class or the point where her friend is. This means, for teachers, a recognition that children are at different points in their learning and their development, and that they must be helped to progress.

## Positive statements

GCSE and Records of Achievement both demand that we express pupils' attainments on an individual basis. Reference should be made to criteria for assessment, and teachers are no longer required to assess pupils in relation to each other.

However, it is still tempting to revert to the language of comparison: to say that a child is not performing as well as others. This may be true and a relevant comment in some situations, but for the child what is important is why her performance is not as good as others' and what can be done about it.

Some teachers have had to learn a new language both for GCSE and for ROA. They need to assess a pupil's achievement from the 'base-line' upwards, not from the top downwards. This can be difficult, because teachers are, hopefully! in the most able category in terms of intelligence, and therefore may find it challenging to relate to the level of ability of the majority of their pupils. This can be especially true when teachers have not had any training in the professional sphere and are ignorant about children's learning processes. We tend, in that case, to judge others according to our own attainment against which most of the population would be found wanting!

We have to learn to recognise and reward success in relation to clearly defined criteria and to enable pupils to see what they are able to do and to take pride in that.

This approach also enables teachers to organise their work so as to give **regular and frequent** feedback to pupils. This is an important factor in the motivation of students to learn.

The setting of criteria for success forces teachers to think in detail about the content of their teaching syllabus and about how they intend to bring about learning. It also obliges the breaking-up of work to be covered into blocks which can be assessed.

In this respect, both modular curricula and graded test schemes have their place. And these, too, relate to the TVEI curriculum.

However, there are other elements which are equally important in the recent developments in modern languages: the communicative use of language and the implications for teaching it; and the task-based teaching and learning which has followed on from the graded objectives schemes and from TVEI.

## Classroom interaction

### WEST SUSSEX GRADED OBJECTIVES

I first found myself reflecting on the changes in my teaching style when using the **GOALS (Graded Objectives in Achievement in Language Studies)** scheme in West Sussex. We used this with our intake at 13+ and continued it with students up to a mode 3 'O' level in French, with some German at levels 1 and 2. Our two Intermediate feeder schools also used levels 1 and 2 in French.

The first benefit we noticed was a greater enthusiasm for French among the students. They were eager to continue their GOALS work and often asked in the first lesson: 'Will I be able to do my GOALS 2, miss?'. In addition, they were keen to try out answers to questions in class and were not inhibited by the thought of failure. They generally had good accents and spoke with some fluency.

After options at 14+, we generally had a continuation rate of 60-65%. Students continued with the GOALS course towards a Mode 3 either for CSE or GCE. In the CSE, we still had the element of continuous assessment which had been so popular at lower levels. Students had a series of Oral Assignments, which were designed to arise from the course work. They prepared these and were tested on them when they declared themselves ready. In this way, they could control the possibility of achievement and the possibility of failure was minimised: the focus was on **success**.

Another important feature of the GOALS syllabus in the improvement of pupil performance was the weighting of oral work equally with that of the receptive skills, while writing had a lower weighting. In this way, the work which presents most problems for language students in terms of accuracy had a low profile. It is necessary to remember that English people do not speak or write with total grammatical accuracy in their own language and neither do French people!

What is relevant in this is the importance of encouraging students in their language learning and enabling them to enjoy their work as the prime motivator. It is unhelpful to constantly put halts in their way by stopping to pursue accuracy. The emphasis for our students was on their real desire to **communicate** and this helped them to override difficulties they encountered.

When our students continued to advanced studies, they coped very well with prose work and enjoyed finding out about the structures underpinning what they had learnt before. My present 'A' level students have another tool to help them to develop accuracy. We use the computer room and all the students have a disc. This enables them to work on the word-processor in self- and pair-critical style.

This is not to say that students had not learnt any grammar before the sixth form. The difference is in emphasis. We acquired the grammar as the need for it arose, as a tool of learning. It did not dominate the teaching cycle but informed it. In previous years, when working with *Use of French* papers (one of the papers set in the GCSE examination of the Associated Examining Board) for example, I found we were learning the grammar because we needed it for the exam, but not for any other purpose.

The other problem to be addressed is that of general inaccuracy. In today's world variations in spellings and grammar are common. In as much as language is a constantly evolving tool, can we say that these are 'mistakes'? Do we in fact recognise perfectly well what is meant? In the same way, I remember in our GOALS moderation meetings, a frequent phrase in discussion: *'does it convey the message?'* - if it did, it was correct. Additional marks were awarded for accuracy and fluency.

As I was brought up on Latin and French grammar and happened to enjoy both, I am frequently struck by these 'inaccuracies' as they appear to me. But I have been fortunate in not experiencing problems with spelling and grammar. With my 'A' level students, I can and do express mock horror that they have so little regard for accuracy that they can give a noun one gender on one line and another on the next.

To me, this inconsistency is again an instance of their general inaccuracy; they do not see their mistakes as mistakes: they don't seem to have identified these items as important at an earlier stage when they first learnt them. It is not that they aren't conscientious - they are, but they have not been taught to constantly look for mistakes and perhaps rightly so.

When I consider the problems some of my students have with basic understanding and spellings, I am more inclined to look for and to celebrate the things they can do, than to reinforce any failure. I do not wish them to be constantly looking for mistakes, I'd rather they try to express themselves and we'll learn the accuracy as we go along.

SEG MODULAR GCSE

In reflecting on these changes in classroom behaviour brought about by the emphasis on communicative skills for graded objectives, I believe these changes have been reinforced for me by the work with the SEG Modular GCSE in French. This course again is based on the recognition of success and the significance of communicative skills.

The course encourages the use of communicative language and is task-based. The assessment arises from the coursework. There are five modules, two foundation and three optional. In the original design, it was intended that these could link with TVEI cross-curricular schemes and be used in fully modular curricula. For the immediate present, the National Curriculum requirements seem to make it doubtful whether students can pursue courses which allow this flexibility and so the scheme has developed in single languages only at present, although there are already links being piloted with Business Studies.

Work is assessed for students in each module according to levels of attainment which relate to basic and extended levels for GCSE, in accordance with the national criteria. There are three levels of achievement for the foundation modules and four in the optional modules. Students are able to see in advance what they are required to do and can attempt the assessment tasks as they progress through the work, going as far as they wish.

As each module is completed, the assessments are moderated, and students receive certificates from the SEG giving details of their attainment in the four language skills. They can relate their levels of achievement to a scale which equates levels of performance to GCSE grades. Therefore, as the course progresses, they can see which GCSE grade they are likely to obtain.

The features of regular feedback and positive attainment, with a concentration on communicative language acquisition, have proved the major advantage of this scheme over any other presently available. It has proved very popular with students and with many teachers involved in it. There are serious implications for the teacher, however, in terms of classroom management and in terms of the teacher's role in the classroom.

My most recent work with this course was with a group of fourth year students. The topic we were dealing with was Leisure and we wanted to compare leisure pursuits now with what people used to do. The group had never learnt the imperfect tense but they would obviously need it for this task. Therefore our first strategy was to decide to learn the imperfect tense. The students agreed with me that it was necessary and understood why we were doing it.

The first few sessions on the imperfect were probably much as I have always taught the imperfect; based on the *A Votre Avis* style of a 'recipe' for the tense. It is a fairly light-hearted approach, but it involves learning the structure and the verb endings.

It is after this initial stage that the process becomes different from what I used to do. The students, having mastered the basic structure, will be using it in different ways. It is then my task to oversee what each one is doing and to offer guidance and to respond to requests for help. This may be on an individual or a group basis.

The work in the classroom therefore must be seen as a series of interactions between teacher and pupil.

Teacher input involves setting the scene at the introduction of a module of work. Teacher and students may discuss what skills they already have to complete the task and what they need to acquire. They may draw up a learning programme together. Students will probably need to practise various structures and to learn new vocabulary.

The first outcome involves the student in producing work in one or more skill area. The teacher then responds by marking or grading or commenting on the work as a form of feedback.

Student and teacher together can then review progress and decide what needs to be done next. They can agree targets and the strategies to be used to reach these targets. They can, if necessary, write a statement together which can be for a profile.

What is implied in this work is that students will need to discuss their progress and seek further teacher input at different points.

The teacher's role in the classroom has to change from that of the central figure leading all activity, to that of a figure around whom activity will develop. The teacher's role in the secondary school classroom therefore becomes much more like that in the primary school, where various activities are going on at the same time and the teacher is the facilitator.

This brings the teacher into much closer proximity with students than some are used to, and may cause some feelings of discomfort. On the other hand, it does allow teachers to identify each student's learning needs and to structure a programme which will address those needs.

For example, when looking at the work my students were doing on their leisure survey, I could see that some had not learnt the tense properly. So I could say *'you need to revise this, I'll test you again tomorrow'* or ask the student's friend to help him learn it and to test him - they generally remember better than I do! Alternatively, it might become evident that the student hasn't understood it at all - *'were you away? for some of it? have you caught up? have you asked anybody to help* *you?'* A whole series of questions may cause different responses and demand the deploying of various tactics.

Group skills and sharing of knowledge are positive spin-offs from this kind of work. That is not to say that students will share work for assessment, but they are not subject to the strains of competitiveness and are willing to help each other - *'I'll explain it, miss'* is a very welcome offer. One, because I want my students to be generous. Two, because it reinforces their learning, to explain to somebody else, and it lets me see whether they have understood. Three, it frees me to go and talk to another student, which is useful in a busy classroom.

This type of work does also require the teacher to have different resources to deploy according to topics being pursued and the student's needs. The classroom must be organised so that students have access to learning resources and to reference materials.

Teachers involved in the pilot of the SEG Modular French GCSE have found striking differences in the behaviour and attitudes of their students in contrast to those following a more traditional course. The first group are more independent in their studies and more willing to pursue an unknown path. They will 'try out' responses to see if they are right and will then develop or modify. They will go and find things out for themselves.

In making a definition of what is 'right' in this context, I come back to the earlier criterion: we are looking for communication. Students have to wrestle with finding out whether their communication is acceptable, at a stage before they reach the point of assessment; that is, they need to practise phrases and words which are correct as far as they can judge them to be.

The teacher tends to need to give information to an individual or to a group as the need arises, which may involve some repetition. One strategy to use here is to ask one student, who has understood the point, to explain it to another, thus reinforcing the first one's learning.

When we deal with assessment in this scheme, we begin at an introductory level where some communication is taking place and extend this into a more sophisticated level. Students are given the criteria for success at each level, so that they know what they have to achieve. The assessment is based on partial or total completion of the task set. For example, if they are to meet somebody at a bus station at a certain time, they could not score if they went to the wrong place, nor if they identified the wrong time. Yet they might score if they did not get all the details of how to recognise the person they were meeting. They still could complete the task if they are at the right place at the right time.

It is more difficult to explain the error at the higher levels of achievement. I find, in fact, that I very rarely say *'that's wrong'*, maybe because language work has never seemed to me to be a sufficiently exact science to have right and wrong so clearly defined. In working in the language classroom now, I more frequently say: *'think about that again'* or *'you wouldn't be understood'* or *'they might understand you but they'd have to think about it'*.

The strategy for improvement would then be *'have you looked at ...?'* or *'what did we use when we wanted to say ...?'*, thereby forcing the student to produce the answer. I might also say *'you could say it more clearly like this'* or *'practise this ...'*, *'find out about .....'*, *'go and ask ..'*.

Reference materials are a useful means of encouraging student autonomy, and we have established their use for practice and in assessment. In the course of a normal lesson, students will often say *'how do I say ...?'*. My reply needs to identify whether they know but have forgotten or never knew or don't want to bother. So I might say *'have you looked it up?'* *'what do you need to look for?'* - this would probably be because a tense of a verb is needed, rather than an infinitive.

If this doesn't help the problem, then I need to spend more time. I might then pursue the line *'do you remember how to say ...?'*. If so, I have perhaps set up a chain of memory which will bring the student to the right point. My intention is always to let them get there by themselves, not to have to tell them, if I can possibly avoid it. It is so much more rewarding to work something out for yourself, if that isn't stating the obvious.

In this way, the teacher is never rejecting pupil performance but is making demands on students to search for answers for themselves. We have then to be ready to recognise some completion of the task in a positive manner.

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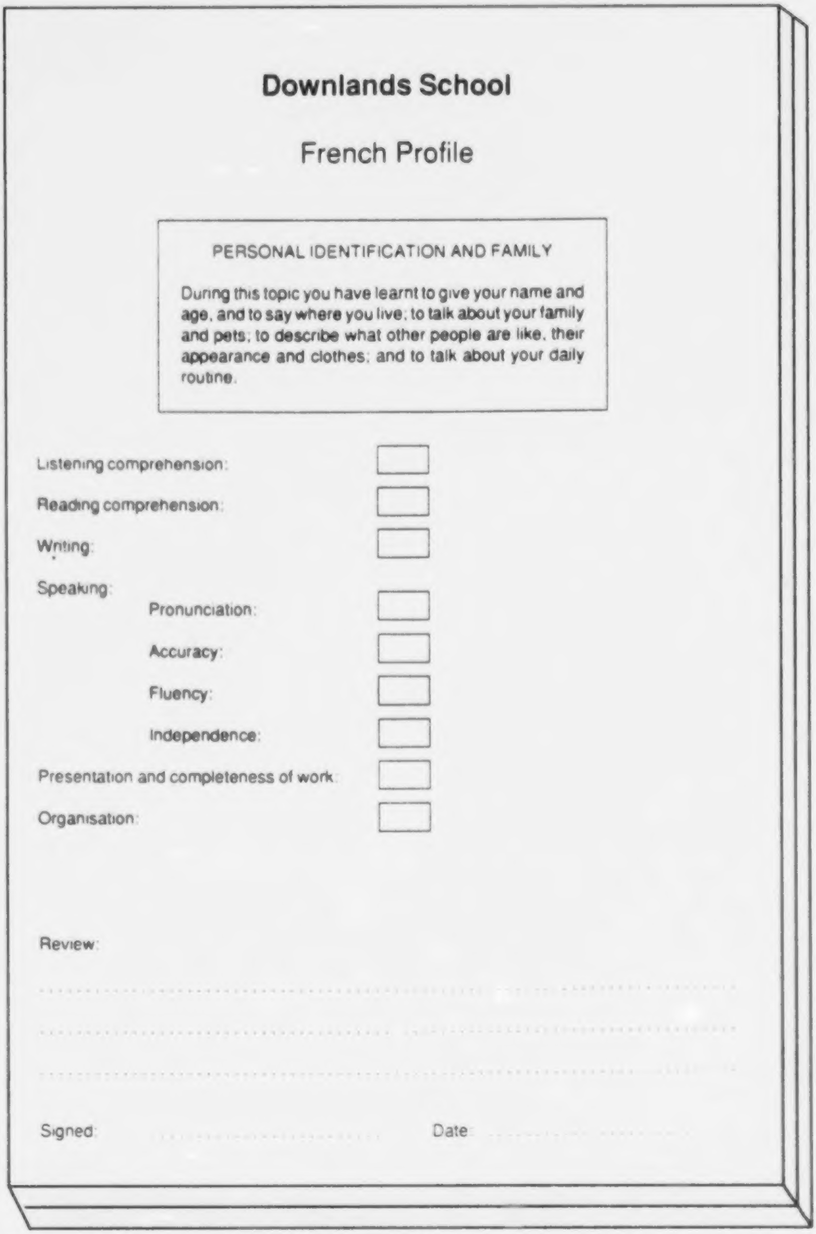


## Downlands School

### French Profile

PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION AND FAMILY

During this topic you have learnt to give your name and age, and to say where you live; to talk about your family and pets; to describe what other people are like, their appearance and clothes; and to talk about your daily routine.

Listening comprehension: ☐

Reading comprehension: ☐

Writing: ☐

Speaking:

- Pronunciation: ☐
- Accuracy: ☐
- Fluency: ☐
- Independence: ☐

Presentation and completeness of work: ☐

Organisation: ☐

Review: ..................................................

..................................................

..................................................

Signed: .............................. Date: ..............................

**An example of a profile produced by a school.**
**(Reproduced by permission of the West Sussex County Council)**

This continuous assessment and review of progress is part of the formative process of Profiling. In addition, it provides the basis for a summative statement, in which pupil and teacher can co-operate. This records areas of learning and progress made by the pupil over a period of time and summarises the achievements reached by the pupil. For second and third year students, reports to parents take the form of a written summary of the assessment statements.

The comment included in these reports produces the recommended strategy for improvement and continued progress. More importantly, the whole process involves the pupils in the recording of their own work and achievements, a point noted with approval by HMI in their recent report on Records of Achievement (1988):

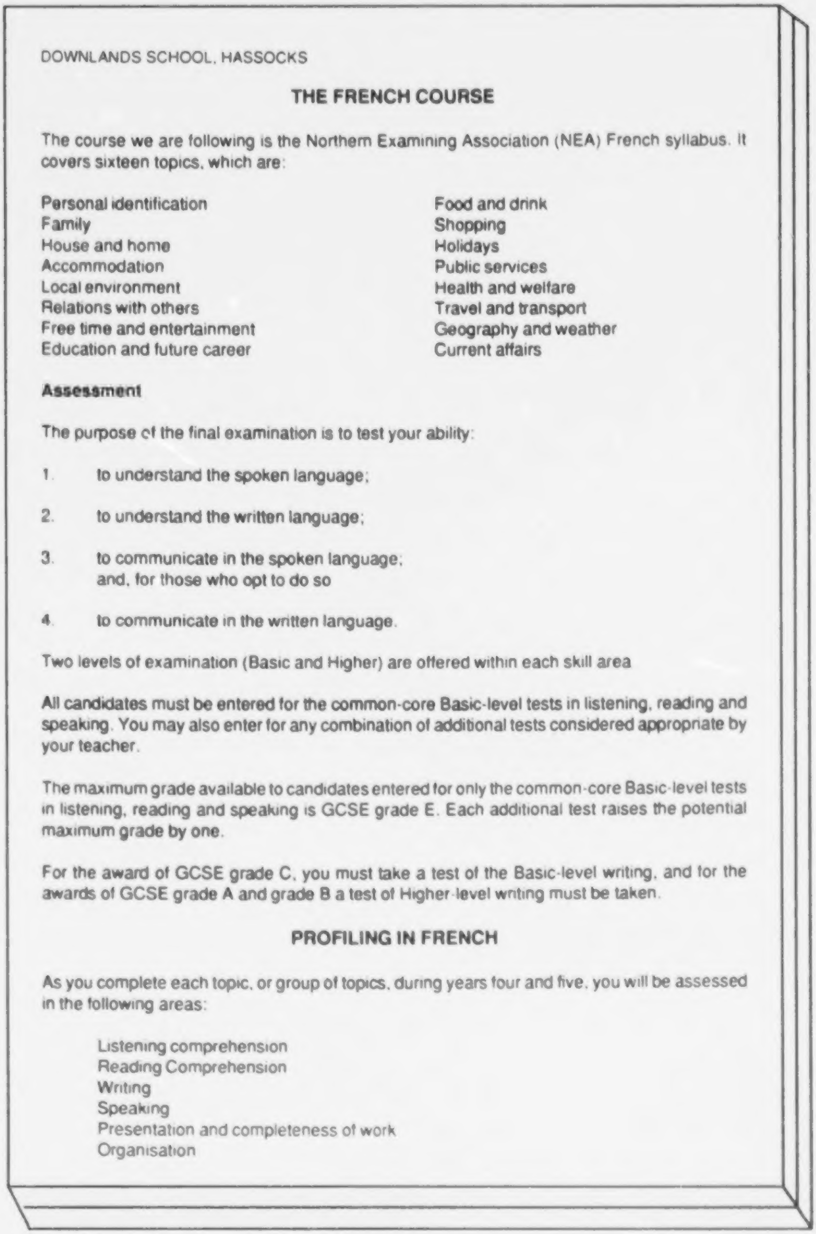
> "The introduction of ROA schemes has increased the incidence of self-assessment by pupils, and has beneficial effects on their awareness, motivation and involvement. Successful self-assessment depends crucially on a number of factors. These include:
>
> > the availability, throughout the course, of clear intelligible assessment criteria, well-matched to the work in progress;
> >
> > an ability, willingness and confidence on the part of pupils to be constructively self-critical;
> >
> > teachers willing to accept and respect pupils' views of themselves and to act on these positively."

The Department at Downlands has also provided a coherent pattern of assessment, in developing agreed marks for each assignment test. These are changed into levels, which the pupils record in their booklets and the teachers in their markbooks. Markbooks are set out in columns according to language skill areas, and marks are colour-coded according to level.

Where remedial help is required, this is applied to the next module of work. There is also a group mark book, which goes on with the group each year, allowing for continuity of recording, even with changes of year group and teacher.

The school also operates a Review Week every half-term, for years 1 to 4, which allows for discussion of individual progress in more detail. The final focus for Review comes from the Pupil's School Journal, in which pupils make a record of their personal experience but which also has a space for teacher comment at the time of the Review, thus providing interim summaries for all interested parties.

The Departmental document on assessment and profiling is reproduced on the following pages, with acknowledgement to the School for permission to use it.



DOWNLANDS SCHOOL, HASSOCKS

### THE FRENCH COURSE

The course we are following is the Northern Examining Association (NEA) French syllabus. It covers sixteen topics, which are:

Personal identification
Family
House and home
Accommodation
Local environment
Relations with others
Free time and entertainment
Education and future career
Food and drink
Shopping
Holidays
Public services
Health and welfare
Travel and transport
Geography and weather
Current affairs

**Assessment**

The purpose of the final examination is to test your ability:

1. to understand the spoken language;
2. to understand the written language;
3. to communicate in the spoken language;
   and, for those who opt to do so
4. to communicate in the written language.

Two levels of examination (Basic and Higher) are offered within each skill area

All candidates must be entered for the common-core Basic-level tests in listening, reading and speaking. You may also enter for any combination of additional tests considered appropriate by your teacher.

The maximum grade available to candidates entered for only the common-core Basic-level tests in listening, reading and speaking is GCSE grade E. Each additional test raises the potential maximum grade by one.

For the award of GCSE grade C, you must take a test of the Basic-level writing, and for the awards of GCSE grade A and grade B a test of Higher-level writing must be taken.

### PROFILING IN FRENCH

As you complete each topic, or group of topics, during years four and five, you will be assessed in the following areas:

Listening comprehension
Reading Comprehension
Writing
Speaking
Presentation and completeness of work
Organisation

DOWNLANDS SCHOOL, HASSOCKS

Each assessment area is divided into three levels: Basic (B), Intermediate (I) and Higher (H). You have a detailed description of each of these levels in this booklet.

The assessment of your performance and progress is carried out by two people: your French teacher and yourself. Your listening, reading and writing assessments will be marked to give you information about your performance. For example, if your work is given the grade L/C-I, this means "Listening comprehension - intermediate level". In addition, you will be asked to assess your own ability to speak French, present your work effectively and organise yourself.

Your performance in the assessments will help decide what level of entry will be appropriate for you in the final examination.

## FRENCH PROFILE AREAS

### LISTENING COMPREHENSION

B You are able to understand specific details in short utterances.

I You can understand most of the relevant details in short utterances and some details in slightly extended conversations.

H You can understand almost all details in short utterances and most of the important points in extended conversations.

### READING COMPREHENSION

B You are able to understand signs and notices and to extract some specific information from simple texts.

I You can understand signs and notices and extract almost all relevant information from simple texts.

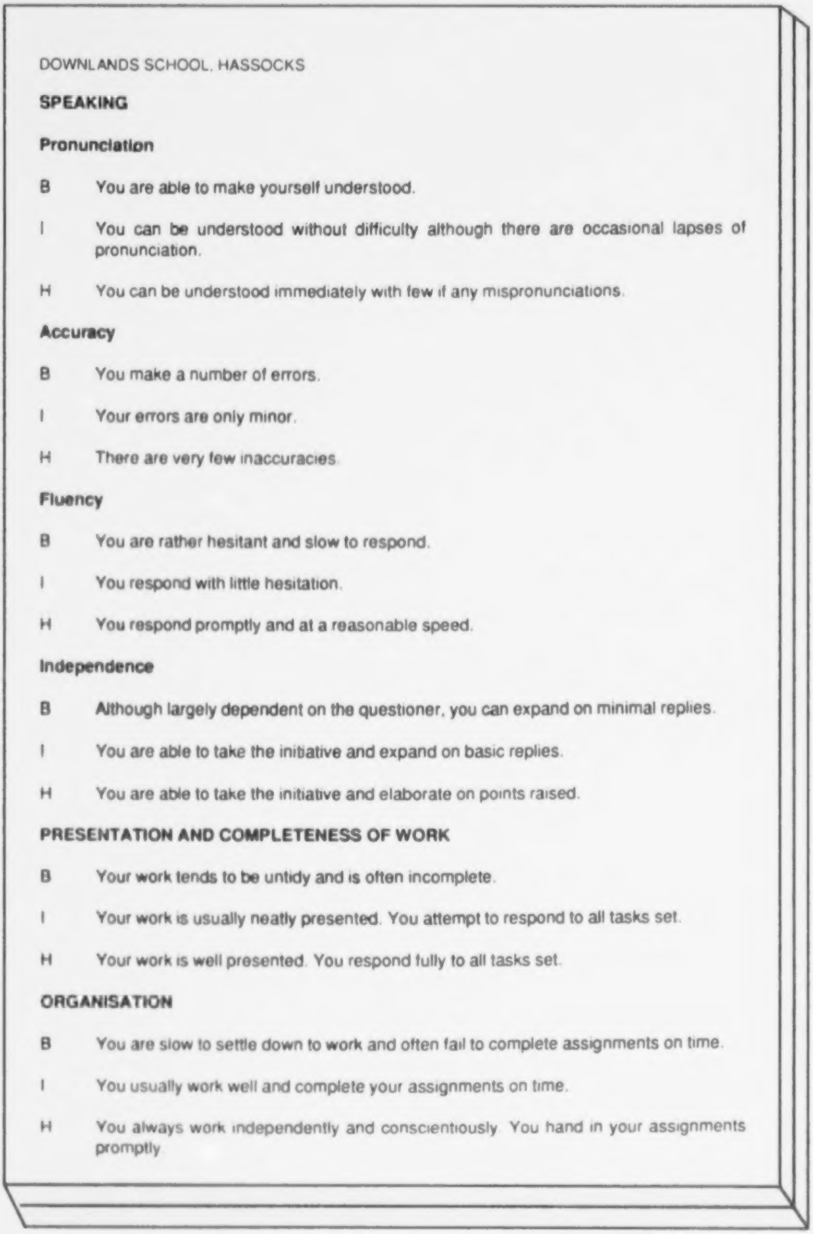
H You can understand signs and notices and identify some of the important points in extended texts.

### WRITING

B You are able to convey some of the information although there are many errors.

I You are able to respond to the main tasks required. Your writing is easy to understand in spite of inaccuracies.

H You are able to respond fully to all the tasks set and to elaborate on points. There are very few inaccuracies of spelling or grammar.



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**SPEAKING**

**Pronunciation**

B You are able to make yourself understood.

I You can be understood without difficulty although there are occasional lapses of pronunciation.

H You can be understood immediately with few if any mispronunciations.

**Accuracy**

B You make a number of errors.

I Your errors are only minor.

H There are very few inaccuracies.

**Fluency**

B You are rather hesitant and slow to respond.

I You respond with little hesitation.

H You respond promptly and at a reasonable speed.

**Independence**

B Although largely dependent on the questioner, you can expand on minimal replies.

I You are able to take the initiative and expand on basic replies.

H You are able to take the initiative and elaborate on points raised.

**PRESENTATION AND COMPLETENESS OF WORK**

B Your work tends to be untidy and is often incomplete.

I Your work is usually neatly presented. You attempt to respond to all tasks set.

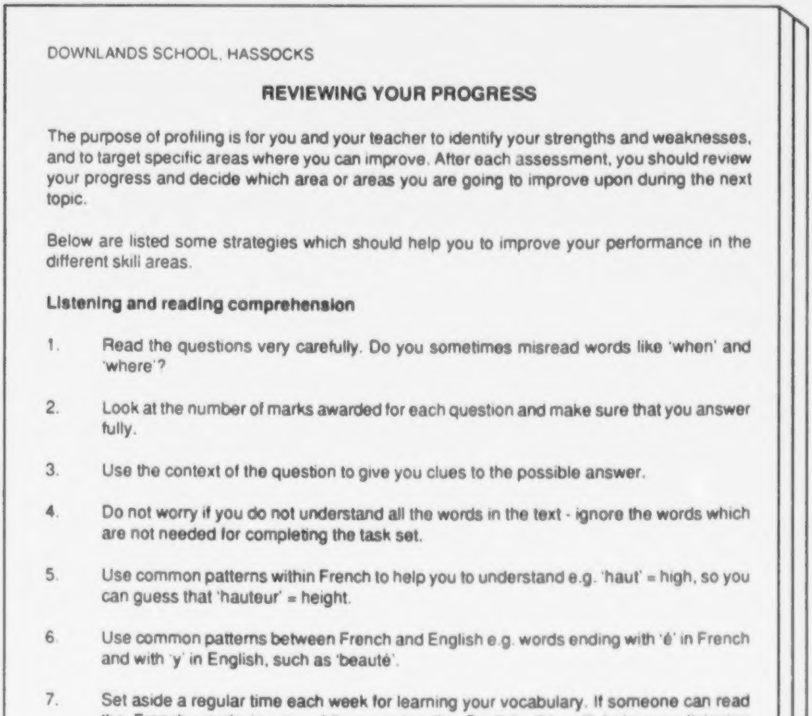
H Your work is well presented. You respond fully to all tasks set.

**ORGANISATION**

B You are slow to settle down to work and often fail to complete assignments on time.

I You usually work well and complete your assignments on time.

H You always work independently and conscientiously. You hand in your assignments promptly.



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## REVIEWING YOUR PROGRESS

The purpose of profiling is for you and your teacher to identify your strengths and weaknesses, and to target specific areas where you can improve. After each assessment, you should review your progress and decide which area or areas you are going to improve upon during the next topic.

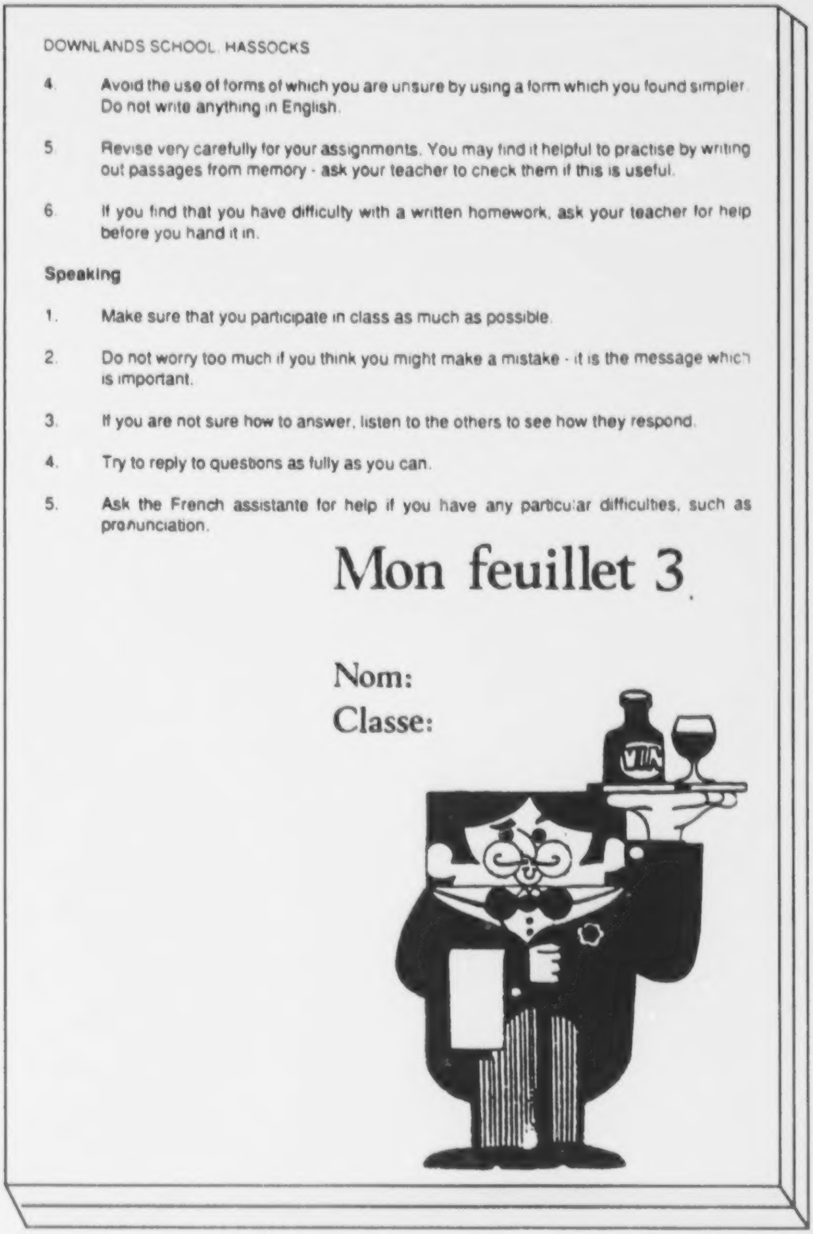
Below are listed some strategies which should help you to improve your performance in the different skill areas.

**Listening and reading comprehension**

1. Read the questions very carefully. Do you sometimes misread words like 'when' and 'where'?
2. Look at the number of marks awarded for each question and make sure that you answer fully.
3. Use the context of the question to give you clues to the possible answer.
4. Do not worry if you do not understand all the words in the text - ignore the words which are not needed for completing the task set.
5. Use common patterns within French to help you to understand e.g. 'haut' = high, so you can guess that 'hauteur' = height.
6. Use common patterns between French and English e.g. words ending with 'é' in French and with 'y' in English, such as 'beauté'.
7. Set aside a regular time each week for learning your vocabulary. If someone can read the French words to you while you give the English, this will help your listening comprehension.
8. When doing a listening comprehension exercise, make sure that you have read all the questions before the passage is played.
9. When doing reading comprehension, read through the whole passage before beginning to answer the questions.
10. When the answers to comprehension are being given in class, make a special note of any key words which you did not know.

**Writing**

1. Make sure that you communicate all the information required, and that you have written the correct number of words.
2. Check your spellings, including accents, very carefully.
3. Ensure that you have the correct endings on your verbs. Check that articles and adjectives agree with their nouns in number and gender.



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4. Avoid the use of forms of which you are unsure by using a form which you found simpler. Do not write anything in English.

5. Revise very carefully for your assignments. You may find it helpful to practise by writing out passages from memory - ask your teacher to check them if this is useful.

6. If you find that you have difficulty with a written homework, ask your teacher for help before you hand it in.

**Speaking**

1. Make sure that you participate in class as much as possible.

2. Do not worry too much if you think you might make a mistake - it is the message which is important.

3. If you are not sure how to answer, listen to the others to see how they respond.

4. Try to reply to questions as fully as you can.

5. Ask the French assistante for help if you have any particular difficulties, such as pronunciation.

## Mon feuillet 3

Nom:
Classe:

CHAPTER FIVE

# GCSE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA AND THEIR MESSAGES FOR THE LEARNER

*Brian Page*

The General Certificate of Secondary Education is an examination defined by National Criteria and closely regulated by the Government through its agent, the Secondary Examinations and Assessment Council. The current criteria for French, which apply to all modern languages, include a set of seven aims which *'describe the educational purposes of following a course in French for the GCSE examination'*. Although the list is not intended to indicate an order of priority, the first of the aims is generally considered primary. It reads: *'To develop the ability to use French effectively for purposes of practical communication.'*

The definition of what such an 'ability' consists of and how it should be assessed are set down in general in the rest of the criteria. These, however, are not sufficiently detailed to give much help to a candidate wishing to improve her performance. The National Criteria are then interpreted by five official examining groups to produce syllabuses and examinations. In order to gain official recognition, these must include criteria for assessment of the candidate's performance, that is, the principles which govern the award of marks. By their nature, then, these are much more informative about the precise linguistic behaviours expected of candidates. Those set out in the GCSE French syllabus published by the Northern Examining Association are as detailed an attempt as any to define this *'ability to use the language effectively for purposes of practical communication'* in behavioural terms and to evaluate it (pp 70-75). The Assessment Criteria have worked reasonably well for examiners but what messages do they contain for the candidate wishing to obtain the highest possible grade and the teacher who has no less an interest in the result? In other words, how are candidates to be shown, particularly during the two years or so preceding the examination, how to improve their performance in order to improve their grades? This may sound a rather mercenary, not to say cynical, view of the examination which is for many the final word on their secondary education. We must not, however, blink the fact that, for candidates, the best grade possible improves opportunities in the next stage of life whether that be employment, more education or training. For teachers, a reasonable set of examination results is willy-nilly a reflection of the quality of their professional expertise; has anybody ever been considered a good teacher who did not get good examination results? For schools, good examination results are becoming increasingly important in a situation where public popularity can mean the difference between closing or staying open. Irrespective then of the educational aims and values of the syllabus and the quality of the activities implied, the final grade has an immense significance for all involved. In that sense examinations will continue, as they always have, to be the main influence on the contents and the methodology of language courses in schools. This influence need not be entirely baleful if the examinations themselves have acceptable aims, are properly constructed and are appropriately assessed. The final stage is the most important; the assessment procedures are the key. To put it crudely, the aims and tests may be splendidly communicative but if the assessment procedure were to consist of deducting one mark for each grammatical error the whole system would be twisted from its intention. There is a second potentially weak link in the chain. The interpretation of the assessment criteria by teams of examiners can also distort the intentions. Assessment criteria have to be capable of simple application. The standardisation of the work of several hundred exam markers means that compatible interpretations of criteria have to be made. There is not much room for subtlety if reliability is to be maintained. The detail of the assessment criteria must therefore lead to greater clarity about the marks to be awarded, not to increasing uncertainty about which category a particular student answer falls into. What earns a mark and what does not has to be fairly clear-cut. It should therefore be equally clear to learners what has to be done in order to improve the mark-earning capacity of their performance. If all is well then this should be equivalent to improving their communicative competence.

The NEA examination currently consists of tests in the four skills - reading, listening, speaking, writing - at two levels - Basic and Higher. There are therefore eight sets of assessment of criteria. In Reading and Listening four marks are awarded at Basic and three at Higher. Each mark level is defined in terms of candidate performance. In Speaking and Writing the system is more complex. In Speaking, the role play is marked out of two at Basic and three at Higher; the conversation at both levels is marked according to four criteria - pronunciation, accuracy, fluency, independence. Each of these is awarded a maximum of two. In writing, similarly, one task at Basic is marked out of two and the other tasks, at both levels, are judged according to content, appropriateness and accuracy, each of these being given a maximum of four. At all stages each mark awarded is described in terms of the candidate's performance. Taking into account that zero also has a description, this adds up to a startling 82 descriptions of segments of expected linguistic behaviour. These can hardly fail to provide a fairly clear pointer both to learners and teachers.

The assessment criteria of Listening and Reading require the learner only to understand; all answers, all evidence of understanding, is to be given in English. There is as yet no mixed skill testing in the NEA examination, though this may change at any time. At Basic the tasks are, paradoxically, potentially difficult because of lack of redundancy. If you are asked to indicate that you understand the sign *Sortie* then either you know it or you don't. Most of the simplest reading tasks are of this sort. In this case the learner must simply learn more words in order to improve. Since a large vocabulary is a greater help to communication than almost anything else, the examination's encouragement is useful.

The Listening tasks at Basic demonstrate a similar paradoxical difficulty. The utterances are short so as not to give the candidate too much language to cope with. However, short utterances have less content, less context and are very ephemeral. A moment's inattention or a quite small contingent noise can make understanding more difficult, even when, as is the case, the candidate is given two chances to hear. In this case, the learner needs, above all, to become familiar with particular features of the spoken language. Even teachers are usually unaware that the grammer of spoken French has some significantly different characteristics from that of the written language. For example, as a general rule, neither nouns nor adjectives have a plural form. Plurality is marked by a change of article or other ancillary word. Also, as a general rule, the third persons of verbs in some tenses have one form for both plural and singular (*il donne/ils donnent, elle chantait/elles chantaient*) or add a consonant (*il finit/ils finissent, elle attend/elles attendent*). Added to these are the changes that elision, contraction and stress can make. Unfortunately few teachers are aware of the need to deal with this. Teachers and textbooks willingly spend time teaching the features of the language that occur only in the written word. It will be some time before teachers and textbooks spend an equal amount of time teaching the features of the spoken word. And yet such awareness is necessary both for speaking and for listening. To improve in both speaking and listening, then, learners need to become as aware of the nature of the spoken language as they are of the written one.

Further skills are implied in the assessment criteria. At Basic, candidates need to be able to distinguish 'relevant' and 'specific' details. This implies the ability to make judgements and sort the information required. At Higher, this sorting must be extended to making decisions about the relative importance of pieces of information. To gain high marks, the implications of words and expressions and their contexts are required as the candidate must *'identify relationships between ideas'* and *'draw conclusions'*. These may sound rather grand expressions. Nevertheless they are accurate descriptions of everyday skills we employ even in very simple ways in our own language. They are obviously the very stuff of communication even at a relatively low level in the foreign tongue. In order to improve their performance, particularly at the Higher levels, learners' attention should perhaps be drawn to what they in fact do with their own language and how this is done in the foreign tongue. Such awareness of purpose or function and examples of how it is effected could be as important to the acquisition of communicative competence as grammar rules were to translation exercises. The important things here are to realise that language awareness is not just grammar in another form and that it must not be taught in the same sterile way in which grammar used to be taught. It is apparent then, that learners can be told quite clearly how to improve their performance in Listening and Reading skills. They need:

- a wide vocabulary;
- a familiarity with the main features of the spoken language;
- an awareness of function which will help them to:
    - sort information into degrees of relevance, specificity and importance;
    - see implications;
    - see the relationships between pieces of information.

In the productive skills the implications of the assessment criteria for the learner's improvement are more complex. In Speaking and Writing the overwhelming criterion for success is the transmission of a relevant message. To enable a decision to be made about whether a message has been transmitted or not, we have evolved the very useful concept of the 'sympathetic native speaker'. This stereotype begs all sorts of questions (what sort of native speaker?) but has nevertheless been invaluable in allowing judgements to be made. If, in the judgement of the examiner, a native speaker wishing to understand would in fact understand, then the message has been transmitted irrespective of any formal errors. At Basic the highest marks are awarded for the transmission of an unambiguous message which is immediately comprehensible to the sympathetic native speaker. Lower marks are awarded where delay in comprehension occurs because of faults in pronunciation or grammatical accuracy. Lower still where these prevent altogether communication of part or all of the message. The unmistakable signal being given to the learner is that grammar and pronunciation do not matter provided they do not prevent the conveying of the message. At this stage the message is one of objective fact. At Higher, different principles apply. Into the criteria awarding the higher marks in pronunciation and accuracy there comes the requirement that there be *'few if any consistent or conspicuous'* errors. Other criteria require candidates to go *'beyond the minimal level of response'*, to show that they have *'little difficulty in self-expression'*, can give *'full descriptions'*, *'convey effectively attitudes and opinions'*. Obviously the adjectives and adverbs in all these phrases are important, even if difficult to define. Candidates also need to give evidence of *'some variety of expression and a degree of refinement and precision'*. It is clear that the mere transmission of the raw material of an objective message is not enough. It is intended that learners should acquire a greater sensitivity and wider knowledge of the semantic and grammatical resources of the language. This knowledge appears to fall into three categories:

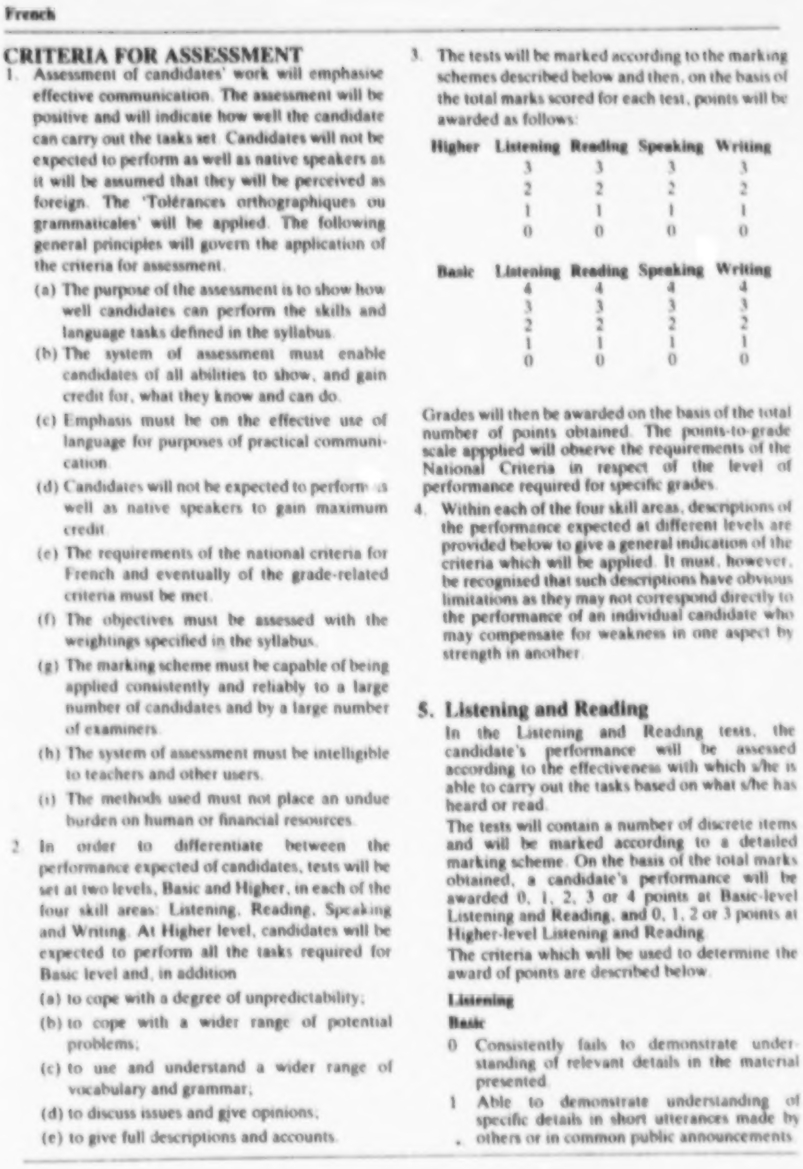
i) having little difficulty in self-expression, conveying effectively attitudes and opinions;

ii) committing few, if any, consistent or conspicuous errors, i.e. showing a degree of grammatical accuracy;

iii) giving full descriptions, using a variety of expressions and providing a degree of refinement and precision.

The first category is obviously concerned with communication. Here the communication is more personal and therefore the information more *nuancé* as opposed to the raw, unambiguous objective information of the messages required at Basic. What remains obscure, however, is the relationship between communication and the other two categories. If communication is established why should *'consistent or conspicuous errors'* matter? If the circumstances require a description in order to effect a communication, what is a *'full description'*? Either the description is full enough to accomplish its purposes or it is not. Either the *'degree of refinement and precision'* is enough to communicate accurately, or it is not. Just what is the *'variety of expression'* for? If all these are not part of the communication, what purpose are they serving? We need to answer these questions if we are not to encourage learners into the quite unnecessary use of more words than are needed for a given purpose. We should not appear to be rewarding verbosity.

Another mark scheme makes the point more clearly as its starkness has none of the sophistication of the NEA attempts at describing the sorts of performance we would all wish to encourage, the sort that we can recognise even if we can't yet describe it adequately. The Southern Examining Group's scheme of marking of the Extended Writing Paper (p 76) is set out under three headings - Transmission, Quality, Range of Language. Transmission is the simple communication of the various aspects, points, elements of the message. Quality refers to inaccuracy and accuracy and undoubtedly applies to formal accuracy. Range of Language applies to the more or less successful use of *'complexity or idiom'*. What is to be observed about these is that there is no attempt to ally the rubrics, Quality and Range of Language, to the Transmission (i.e. communication) in any way. The three elements are treated strictly separately. The message to the learner must be: get your adjective agreements right or you will lose marks; get in a few good idioms like *à toute vitesse* or grammatical complexities like relative clauses and you will win a few bonus points. This looks as though it would encourage the same behaviour as the old GCE six-picture composition did. If we are not once more to encourage this grubbing about for marks we must find some way of connecting the two rubrics, Quality and Range of Language, to Transmission. To do that we must find answers to our questions: what is variety of expression for? What is a full description for? What is a degree of refinement and precision for? And, above all, what is grammatical accuracy for? We must define a good deal more clearly what we are communicating when using a grammatically correct sentence as opposed to what we are communicating when we use a grammatically defective one; what we are communicating when we use a range of language as opposed to what we are communicating when our vocabulary is limited even if effective in conveying messages. When the questions are posed in these ways, the answers begin to appear. Some attempt to deal with them is outlined in the final chapter.



**French**

## CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT

1. Assessment of candidates' work will emphasise effective communication. The assessment will be positive and will indicate how well the candidate can carry out the tasks set. Candidates will not be expected to perform as well as native speakers as it will be assumed that they will be perceived as foreign. The 'Tolérances orthographiques ou grammaticales' will be applied. The following general principles will govern the application of the criteria for assessment.
   - (a) The purpose of the assessment is to show how well candidates can perform the skills and language tasks defined in the syllabus.
   - (b) The system of assessment must enable candidates of all abilities to show, and gain credit for, what they know and can do.
   - (c) Emphasis must be on the effective use of language for purposes of practical communication.
   - (d) Candidates will not be expected to perform as well as native speakers to gain maximum credit.
   - (e) The requirements of the national criteria for French and eventually of the grade-related criteria must be met.
   - (f) The objectives must be assessed with the weightings specified in the syllabus.
   - (g) The marking scheme must be capable of being applied consistently and reliably to a large number of candidates and by a large number of examiners.
   - (h) The system of assessment must be intelligible to teachers and other users.
   - (i) The methods used must not place an undue burden on human or financial resources.
2. In order to differentiate between the performance expected of candidates, tests will be set at two levels, Basic and Higher, in each of the four skill areas: Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing. At Higher level, candidates will be expected to perform all the tasks required for Basic level and, in addition
   - (a) to cope with a degree of unpredictability;
   - (b) to cope with a wider range of potential problems;
   - (c) to use and understand a wider range of vocabulary and grammar;
   - (d) to discuss issues and give opinions;
   - (e) to give full descriptions and accounts.
3. The tests will be marked according to the marking schemes described below and then, on the basis of the total marks scored for each test, points will be awarded as follows:

| **Higher** | **Listening** | **Reading** | **Speaking** | **Writing** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| **Basic** | **Listening** | **Reading** | **Speaking** | **Writing** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Grades will then be awarded on the basis of the total number of points obtained. The points-to-grade scale appplied will observe the requirements of the National Criteria in respect of the level of performance required for specific grades.

4. Within each of the four skill areas, descriptions of the performance expected at different levels are provided below to give a general indication of the criteria which will be applied. It must, however, be recognised that such descriptions have obvious limitations as they may not correspond directly to the performance of an individual candidate who may compensate for weakness in one aspect by strength in another.

### 5. Listening and Reading

In the Listening and Reading tests, the candidate's performance will be assessed according to the effectiveness with which s/he is able to carry out the tasks based on what s/he has heard or read.

The tests will contain a number of discrete items and will be marked according to a detailed marking scheme. On the basis of the total marks obtained, a candidate's performance will be awarded 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4 points at Basic-level Listening and Reading, and 0, 1, 2 or 3 points at Higher-level Listening and Reading.

The criteria which will be used to determine the award of points are described below.

**Listening**

**Basic**

0 Consistently fails to demonstrate understanding of relevant details in the material presented.

1 Able to demonstrate understanding of specific details in short utterances made by others or in common public announcements.

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2 Able to demonstrate understanding of specific details in short utterances made by others, and to extract some relevant specific information from such utterances as announcements, instructions, monologues and dialogues.

3 Able to demonstrate understanding of specific details in short utterances made by others, as well as some details in slightly extended utterances or conversations. Able to extract most of the relevant specific information from such utterances as announcements, instructions, monologues and dialogues.

4 Able to demonstrate understanding of specific details in short or slightly extended utterances made by others, and to extract all or almost all relevant specific information from such utterances as announcements, instructions, monologues and dialogues.

**Higher**

0 Fails to demonstrate the qualities required for Higher-level.

1 Able to identify details in short or extended monologues and conversations.

2 Able to identify some of the important points or themes in extended monologues and conversations in a variety of registers.

3 Able to identify most of the important points or themes in extended monologues and conversation. Able to draw conclusions from, and identify relationships between, ideas in extended monologues and conversations in a variety of registers.

**Reading**

**Basic**

0 Consistently fails to demonstrate understanding of relevant details in the material presented.

1 Able to demonstrate understanding of some common instructions, signs and notices on public display.

2 Able to demonstrate understanding of common instructions, signs and notices on public display, and to extract some relevant specific information from such texts as simple brochures, guides and letters.

3 Able to demonstrate understanding of instructions, signs and notices on public display, and to extract most of the relevant specific information from such texts as simple brochures, guides, letters and other forms of appropriate continuous writing, including imaginative writing.

4 Able to demonstrate understanding of instructions, signs and notices on public display, and to extract all or almost all relevant specific information from such texts as simple brochures, guides, letters and other forms of appropriate writing, including imaginative writing.

**Higher**

0 Fails to demonstrate the qualities required for Higher-level

1 Able to extract important information from short or extended texts.

2 Able to identify some of the important points or themes of short or extended texts and to draw some conclusions from such texts.

3 Able to identify most of the important points or themes in extended texts, to draw conclusions from and to identify relationships in such texts.

## 6. Speaking and Writing

In the Speaking and Writing Tests, the candidate's performance will be assessed according to the effectiveness with which s/he is able to carry out the tasks set. The tests will be marked according to the schemes described below. On the basis of the total marks obtained, a candidate's performances will be awarded 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4 points at Basic-level Speaking and Writing and 0, 1, 2 or 3 points at Higher-level Speaking and Writing.

**Speaking**

**Basic level**

The weighting of the role-playing section in relation to the conversation will be 1:1.

**Role-playing situations**

Each utterance in the role-playing situations will be marked according to the following scale.

0 Inappropriate initiative or response. Failure to communicate the necessary information.

1 Appropriate initiative or response. Although some inaccuracy or loss of part of the message may cause difficulty for a sympathetic native speaker's immediate comprehension or prevent the full accomplishment of the task set, some relevant information is, nevertheless, communicated.

2 Correct and appropriate initiative or response. In spite of minor errors or the possible omission of a minor element of the message, the task set is accomplished with no ambiguity.

Total marks for 3 role-playing situations with three utterances in each:

$3 \times 2 \times 3 = 18$

**Conversation**

The candidate's performance in the conversation will be assessed according to the effectiveness of communication with a sympathetic native speaker. The following criteria will be used, each weighted equally:

**French**

**Pronunciation:** the extent to which accent, intonation and stress facilitates (or interferes with) effective communication.

**Accuracy:** the extent to which grammatical accuracy facilitates (or interferes with) effective communication.

**Fluency:** the extent to which readiness of response and continuity of performance contribute to effective communication.

**Independence:** the extent to which the candidate is able to initiate conversation and/or to expand on bare essentials to make an independent contribution to the conversation.

**Content:** the amount of relevant information which the candidate is able to convey in relation to the topics for the conversation.

In each of the above categories, the candidate will be awarded 0, 1 or 2 marks according to the level of performance as indicated below provided that the conversation is relevant to the given topics. Largely irrelevant conversations will not be marked according to these criteria. The examiners, will, under these circumstances, decide on what, if any, credit can be given for the performance as a whole.

**Pronunciation**

0 Pronunciation is such that the message would be unintelligible to a sympathetic native speaker.

1 In spite of causing some difficulty for immediate comprehension or leading to some initial misunderstanding, pronunciation is such that the overall message is intelligible to a sympathetic native speaker, allowing for requests for repetition or clarification.

2 Although requiring an effort of concentration from a sympathetic native listener, the message is for the most part intelligible, causing only occasional difficulty.

**Accuracy**

0 The frequency and/or type of errors made are a permanent barrier to communication.

1 In spite of causing some difficulty for immediate comprehension or leading to some initial misunderstanding, the overall message is intelligible to a sympathetic native speaker, allowing for requests for repetition or clarification.

2 Although requiring an effort of concentration from a sympathetic native speaker, the message is for the most part intelligible, causing only occasional difficulty.

**Fluency**

0 The candidate does not respond readily. Delivery is slow, halting and disjointed to the extent that communication is seriously impaired.

1 Although the candidate may be slow to respond and delivery may be hesitant in places, there is some continuity of performance allowing a reasonable exchange of information to take place.

2 Readiness of response and continuity of performance is such that the exchange of information has a reasonable flow in spite of pauses.

**Independence**

0 The candidate makes no independent contribution to the conversation.

1 Although the candidate is dependent on the initiative of the native speaker and relies largely on information supplied in order to respond, the candidate is able to use the information appropriately for his/her own purposes.

2 Although largely dependent on the initiative of the tolerant native speaker, shows some ability to expand on minimal replies.

**Content**

0 Coverage of the topics inadequate. Hardly any relevant information conveyed to the native speaker.

1 Although coverage of the topics is limited, some relevant information is conveyed.

2 The candidate is able to convey relevant information on most of the aspects covered in the conversation.

Total marks for conversation:
5 × 2 = 10

For the Basic-level Speaking test as a whole the marks for the role-playing situations and the conversation will be scaled to achieve the ratio 1:1, and totalled. On the basis of the total marks obtained, candidates will be awarded 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4 points.

**Higher level**

At Higher level, the weighting of the role-playing section in relation to the conversation will be 2:3.

**Role-playing situations**

At Higher-level both structured and less-structured situations will be used.

In the case of **structured role-playing situations**, each response will be awarded 0, 1, 2 or 3 marks depending on the level of performance.

0 Inappropriate response. Failure to communicate the necessary information.

1 Appropriate initiative or response. Although some inaccuracy or omission of part of the message may cause difficulty for a sympathetic native speaker's immediate comprehension or prevent the full accomplishment of the task set, some relevant information is, nevertheless, communicated.

2 Appropriate initiative or response. In spite of minor errors or the possible omission of a minor element of the message, the task set is accomplished with no ambiguity.

3 Correct and appropriate initiative or response. The task set is fully accomplished with no ambiguity and with no conspicuous or consistent errors which would cause offence to a native speaker's ear.

In the case of **less-structured role-playing situations**, marks will be awarded using the same criteria as those for the structured situations but in relation to the tasks set which may not correspond directly with each utterance. Where one of the role-playing situations requires the collecting and noting of information, this information will be allocated half of the marks for that role-playing situation and will be assessed as follows.

0 Less than 60% of all the information correctly noted.

1 60% of all the information correctly noted.

2 80% of all the information correctly noted.

3 100% of all information correctly noted.

The remaining half of the marks will be allocated on the same basis as the structured/less-structured role-playing situations, as appropriate.

The marks for the two role-playing situations at Higher-level will be scaled, as necessary, to give the same totals.

**Conversation**

The conversation at this level will be marked under the same five categories as those used for Basic-level. Provided that the conversation is relavant to the given topics, 0, 1 or 2 marks will be awarded under each heading. It should be noted, however, that if a candidate entered at Higher Level scores 1 or 2 marks in any of the categories listed below, s/he will automatically be credited with 2 marks for the corresponding category or categories at Basic Level. If, on the other hand, a candidate entered at Higher Level fails to achieve the Higher Level standard in any of the categories, his or her performance will be assessed according to the criteria contained within the corresponding category or categories at Basic Level.

**Pronunciation**

0 Fails to demonstrate the qualities required for Higher level.

1 Although there may be occasional lapses in accent, intonation and stress, a sympathetic native speaker would understand without difficulty and communication never breaks down.

2 Pronunciation is such that it would be immediately comprehensible to a native speaker. Although the candidate would not be taken for a native speaker, there are few, if any, consistent or conspicuous mispronunciations.

**Accuracy**

0 Fails to demonstrate the qualities required for Higher level.

1 Grammatical accuracy is such that a sympathetic native listener would understand without difficulty. Occasional lapses in accuracy are of a minor nature and do not interfere with communication.

2 Accuracy is such that what is said would be immediately comprehensible to a native speaker. Although the candidate would not be taken for a native speaker there are very few, if any, consistent or conspicuous grammatical inaccuracies.

**Fluency**

0 Fails to demonstrate the qualities required for Higher level.

1 The candidate responds with little hesitation and is generally able to maintain the flow of the conversation although there may be some unevenness caused by rephrasing or searching for words.

2 The candidate is prompt to respond and is able to sustain a flow of conversation at a reasonable speed. If there are pauses, these are natural and not obtrusive.

**Independence**

0 Fails to demonstrate the qualities required for Higher level.

1 The candidate is able to take the initiative and/or expand on bare essentials making some independent contribution to the conversation.

2 The candidate makes few demands of the listener and contributes significantly to the conversation both by taking the initiative and by elaborating, clarifying, or refining points raised.

**Content**

0 Fails to demonstrate the qualities required for Higher level.

1 In spite of some limitation in self-expression, the candidate is able to give some opinions and has sufficient lexical command to convey a good deal of information on most aspects of the topics covered.

2 The candidate shows the ability to communicate ideas and opinions and his lexical command allows him to cope with almost all of the topics covered, and to give full descriptions and accounts.

The marks for the role-playing situations and for the conversation will be scaled to reflect the ratio 2:3, added together and, on the basis of the total marks scored, candidates awarded 0, 1, 2 or 3 points for Higher-level Speaking.

**French**

**Writing**

**Basic-level**

The weighting of the message(s) in relation to the letter will be 1:2.

**Messages — i.e. closely directed writing tasks**

The candidate's response to **each task set** will be marked according to the following scale.

0 Fails to communicate the necessary message.

1 Appropriate response. Although some inaccuracy or omission may cause difficulty for a sympathetic speaker's immediate comprehension, most of the message is, nevertheless, communicated.

2 Appropriate response. The message required is communicated with no ambiguity although there may be minor lapses in accuracy.

**Letter — i.e. less directed writing tasks**

The candidate's performance will be assessed according to the following criteria:

**Content:** the extent of relevant information conveyed.

**Appropriateness of language:** the extent to which the language used is appropriate and effective.

**Accuracy:** the extent to which lexical and grammatical accuracy facilitates (or interferes with) effective communication.

Under each of the above categories, candidates will be awarded 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4 marks according to the level of performance as indicated below. Largely irrelevant answers will not be marked according to these criteria. The examiners will, under these circumstances, decide what, if any, credit can be given for the answer as a whole.

**Content**

0 Nothing of merit. Hardly any relevant information conveyed to the native speaker.

1 Although coverage of the points required is minimal and there may be important omissions, some relevant information is conveyed.

2. The candidate is able to convey some factual information in relation to the tasks required even though the response is basic and there may be some omissions.

3 The candidate is able to respond to most of the tasks required and to communicate essential messages in response to them.

4 The candidate is able to elicit and convey relevant information in response to all or almost all of the tasks required. The candidate shows some ability to go beyond a minimal level of response.

**Appropriateness of language**

0 The language used is too limited to merit a mark.

1 Although the language used may be extremely limited and not always entirely appropriate to the tasks, it is sufficient to communicate some basic messages in spite of obvious gaps.

2 The language used is sufficiently appropriate to convey factual information in relation to the most important tasks even though it may be simple and/or repetitive.

3 The language used conveys appropriately factual information in relation to most of the tasks.

4 The language used conveys relevant information in relation to all or almost all the tasks appropriately and effectively.

**Accuracy**

0 Inaccuracy is such that it is a barrier to communication.

1 Although frequent inaccuracies may cause consistent difficulty for immediate comprehension, some factual information is generally intelligible to a sympathetic native speaker, allowing for back-tracking and inferencing.

2 Although inaccuracy may make communication difficult or may lead to misunderstandings, essential messages of a factual nature are conveyed.

3 Most of the messages are conveyed in spite of errors and although requiring an effort of concentration on the part of the native speaker.

4 Accuracy is such that all or almost all the messages are conveyed sufficiently effectively for a native speaker to understand.

For the Basic-level Writing Test as a whole, the marks for the message(s) and the letter will be scaled to reflect the ratio 1:2, added together and on the basis of the total marks obtained, candidates will be awarded 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4 points.

**Higher-level Writing**

At Higher-level, the candidate's response to the two questions, which will be weighted 1:1, will be marked under each of the three categories used at Basic level for the less-directed writing tasks. Under each of the three categories, candidates will be awarded 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4 marks according to the level of performance as indicated below. Largely irrelevant answers will not be marked according to these criteria. The examiners will, under these circumstancs, decide what, if any, credit can be given for the answer as a whole.

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**Content**

0 Fails to demonstrate the qualities required for Higher level.

1 Although there may be some omissions, the candidate is able to respond to the main tasks required and to cover the essential points in the response.

2 The candidate is able to elicit and convey relevant information in relation to all or almost all the tasks set. Although there may be obvious limitations in self-expression, the candidate shows the ability to go beyond a minimal level of response.

3 The candidate is able to respond reasonably fully to the tasks set. Some ability to describe, give accounts, communicate attitudes and opinions will be demonstrated.

4 The candidate is able to respond fully to all the tasks set, even though there may be minor omissions. The candidate has little difficulty in self-expression, is able to elaborate on points, to give full descriptions and accounts and to convey effectively attitudes and opinions.

**Appropriateness of language**

0 Fails to demonstrate the qualities required for Higher level.

1 Although the language used is not wide in scope it is appropriate and sufficient to communicate essential points in relation to the tasks set.

2 The language used is appropriate and goes beyond that required for a minimal response to the tasks set. The writing has some coherence and continuity.

3 The language used produces a coherent response or account even though communication in places may be disjointed. The writing shows some variety of expression and a degree of refinement and precision appropriate to descriptions/accounts and the communication of attitudes and opinions.

4 The language used is appropriate and effective. The writing shows both coherence and continuity. The degree of refinement and precision is such that descriptions and accounts are full and effective and attitudes and opinions clearly communicated.

**Accuracy**

0 Fails to demonstrate the qualities required for Higher level.

1 Even though an effort of concentration on the part of the reader may be required, grammatical and lexical inaccuracies in the communication of essential points would rarely lead to misunderstanding of the main messages.

2 Although inaccuracies are such that immediate comprehension may be delayed, essential points would be understood without difficulty.

3 Inaccuracies are mainly of a minor nature and do not seriously interfere with the overall communication of the response/account.

4 There are very few, if any, consistent or conspicuous grammatical or lexical inaccuracies. Where inaccuracies do occur, they may result from the candidate's use of an extended range of language to elaborate on given points.

The marks for the two Higher-level questions will be totalled and, on the basis of the total marks scored, candidates awarded 0, 1, 2 for 3 points for Higher-level Writing.

# Southern Examining Group

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GCSE MODERN LANGUAGES

## A. MARKING THE EXTENDED WRITING PAPER - 1989

Following re-appraisals of the marking schemes used for the Extended Writing Papers in Modern Languages in Summer 1988, certain modifications will be introduced in the schemes used in the Summer 1989 examinations. It is emphasised that there is no change in the underlying principles involved but rather a series of refinements to enable a number of examiners marking separately to implement the principles as fairly as possible. Candidates will continue to be rewarded for positive achievement in demonstrating what they know, understand and can do.

Each question will be marked out of 60 as follows:

Transmission of information : 20 marks
Quality of transmission : 20 marks
Range of language : 20 marks
} Weightings as in 1988

### Transmission

Transmission will be marked on COMMUNICATION only. Marks will be awarded either for points required in, for example, a rubric or for relevant points made in a narrative. Marks will be awarded if points would be understood, without undue effort, by a native speaker.

### Quality

Quality will be assessed on a 0-20 scale as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| 0 | Extremely inaccurate |
| 1 - 4 | Very inaccurate |
| 5 - 8 | Fairly inaccurate |
| 9 - 12 | Not too inaccurate |
| 13 - 16 | Fairly accurate |
| 17 - 20 | Very accurate |

### Range of language

Range of language will also be assessed on a 0-20 scale as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| 0 | To be awarded if Transmission mark is 0 |
| 1 - 4 | Basically simple. No successful attempt at complexity or idiom |
| 5 - 8 | Fairly simple. Little successful attempt at complexity or idiom |
| 9 - 12 | Some successful attempt at complexity and idiom |
| 13 - 16 | Fairly successful attempt at complexity and idiom |
| 17 - 20 | Mainly coherent and complex range of language and idiom |

March 1989

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## CHAPTER SIX

# EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL ASSESSMENT: A DISCUSSION OF TWO NFER PROJECTS

*Peter Dickson*

Let us imagine a learner who, when making efforts to use a foreign language, is hesitant but persistent, inaccurate but given to self-correction and unclear but inventive enough to circumvent obvious difficulties. How are we to judge attempts of this kind? We may choose to focus on the negative aspects - the hesitation, the inaccuracies, the inability to use entirely appropriate forms - and compare it unfavourably with others which may be free of those characteristics. Alternatively, we may view the efforts made in a positive light, acknowledging the quality of tenacity and the ability to employ strategies which help to convey intended meanings and sustain communication in a language of which the user has perhaps only a slender knowledge.

The view which we instinctively adopt is likely to be governed, at least in part, by our attitudes to teaching and learning. If we regard the setting of targets, the comparison of performance with particular standards and correction as important elements in promoting learning we should probably take a negative view. If, on the other hand, we attach more importance to factors such as the recognition of achievement, learner autonomy and motivation then we should almost certainly be predisposed to focus on the positive features.

The contrast between different views of teaching and learning is real enough but it can be misleading to emphasise the contrast between different conceptions of assessment; to do so is to risk suggesting that they are in competition with each other. It is not, of course, right or wrong to adopt a particular approach to assessment, but a consequence of the purpose for which the assessment is being made or the uses to which the results are to be put.

The following pages give an account of two assessment projects carried out at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) - The Monitoring of Foreign Languages in Schools for the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) and Modern Languages in Schools (MODLS). The APU project provides an example of an external assessment carried out using formal testing procedures; the MODLS project was directed, on the other hand, at forms of internal assessment, developed and implemented by teachers, using more informal methods. Both concerned pupils who had completed two, three or four years of study. The description of the work carried out in each project is given to provide an illustration of the relationship between the purposes, the methods and the uses of assessment and, at the same time, it aims to demonstrate that different models of assessment are not exclusive but capable of complementing each other within a coherent system of curriculum evaluation.

## The APU Monitoring of Foreign Languages

The aim of the APU surveys of foreign language performance among 13-year olds in schools was to indicate broadly the levels of proficiency which had been reached, and to provide information about the variety of ways in which pupils were able to apply the language they had learnt. Both purposes and uses are reflected in this statement of aims. In more specific terms the purpose of the surveys was to assess individual attainment in French, German and Spanish, and collect information about the circumstances in which pupils learnt, and about their attitudes to language learning generally. The assessment results and the background information were to be used in a number of ways: to report on different aspects of foreign language performance, to compare the performance of different groups, for example boys and girls, those who had visited the foreign country and those who had not, and finally, to provide descriptions of performance at different levels and on different language tasks to assist an understanding of pupil's development. In contrast to other kinds of external assessment used to examine and accredit pupils the APU assessment results did not need to differentiate individual performance for the purpose of grading.

The particular purposes of the APU surveys and the uses to which the assessment information was to be put were, therefore, made explicit before the assessment methods were developed. Clarifying aims is, of course, an important principle in any development; in assessment an awareness of purpose is crucial for deciding on what and how to assess. The decisions taken in the course of developing test materials for use in the APU surveys were made by reference to some general principles, reflecting the purposes and uses outlined above. These principles can be summarised as follows. The tests should:

- reflect the content and scope of the foreign languages curriculum in schools;
- reflect a consensus view of approaches to teaching and learning;
- maximise opportunities for pupils to perform well;
- provide reliable estimates of pupils' performance;
- provide details of pupils' knowledge and skills.

The APU assessment framework, the tests and the assessment methods were developed by balancing these principles. In particular, a compromise had to be reached between the principle that the tests should reflect widely held views about communicative language teaching and an apparently conflicting principle that the tests should yield scores on which comparisons could reliably be made. When we think in terms of teaching and learning we may accept uneasily the notion that what learners do needs to be judged right or wrong or graded according to a scale of performance; in the context of an assessment, on the other hand, in which performance has to be compared with other performances or with defined criteria it is in the nature of the exercise to do so.

A review of the main features of the APU listening tests illustrates the nature of the compromise sought when the tests were designed and constructed:

- individual test items relate to a task, that is to say that the purposes of listening to each text is clear;
- the question relates to a task in that it focuses on the relevant meaning within the text;
- test items are set in a realistic context, recognisable to the test takers. The setting is described and the items are linked thematically;
- the variety of listening texts and listening skills reflects the different kinds of listening in situations of authentic use.

These particular features respond to what we might call 'a teacher's view' of assessment; they are consistent with the idea of language as communication and they stress the requirements of explicitness and clarity - implied by the principle referred to above that opportunities for pupils to perform well should be maximised. However, if explicitness, in the sense that the tasks for candidates taking tests must be clear, is a factor we associate with the teacher's view of assessment, then certainty, in the sense that test results must be unambiguous, is a factor we associate with the examiner's or assessor's view. The following features of the APU listening tests had much more to do with questions of certainty than with a concern to present the tests as communicative language activities:

- listening is assessed in isolation from speaking;
- although listening texts were selected and produced with authenticity in mind, other aspects of authenticity, for example background noise, are excluded;
- instructions and linking narrative are in English to ensure the assessment focuses on understanding of the foreign language text;
- questions used are in open-ended or multiple choice format as others were found to produce more random results.

Any one of these characteristics of the tests might be thought to undermine attempts described above to produce tasks which resembled realistic activities; indeed, it is often for this reason that formal tests are criticised. However, the need for certainty follows another of the principles listed above - that the tests needed to yield reliable estimates of pupils' performance. The compromise reached between these considerations of certainty and explicitness acknowledges also that certainty is a dimension of explicitness just as reliability is an aspect of test validity.

The example taken above serves to illustrate how a compromise was reached between only two of the principles underlying the development of tests for the APU surveys. In order to demonstrate how all five principles described above were balanced, the development is now discussed under the headings: content, design and methods.

## Content of the APU tests

The question of what material to sample for inclusion in tests is much discussed since decisions are governed by a concern to demonstrate validity. The debate on content validity revolves around such questions as: What does it mean to know a language, or to know how to use a language? How should we define the domain from which to sample material? Is the sampling domain finite? In deciding on the content of the APU tests there were good reasons for setting aside esoteric questions such as these and adopting a pragmatic approach. First, the pupils who were to take part in the surveys were, relatively speaking, beginners; most had completed only two years study and their experience of language learning had been confined largely to school. Another factor which facilitated the choice of content was what we might call the consensus curriculum, the syllabus for language learning dictated by examinations at 16+ and exemplified by course books widely in use in schools. Finally, because there was scope to produce a range of tests in each language mode it was possible to include all the main topics which formed part of the beginners' curriculum, thereby easing the problems of deciding on topics to include or exclude. The summary below illustrates how the content of the APU reading tests was defined in terms of settings, sources and topics:

| Settings | Sources | Topics |
|---|---|---|
| On holiday abroad with your family | Letters | Home |
| | Road signs | Self |
| | Advertisements | School |
| Finding a penfriend | Tourist brochures | Family |
| | Signs | Town |
| Letters from your penfriend | Newspapers | Friends |
| | Magazines | Entertainments |
| | Poster | Directions |
| Staying with your penfriend | School timetable | Shopping |
| | Notices | Travel |
| | Telephone message | Weather |
| Going to school abroad with your penfriend | Menu | Food and drink |
| | Advertising | Country |
| | Leaflets | Pastimes |
| | Guidebook | |

The content of both reading and listening tests was summarised under these same headings and the content of the speaking and writing tests according to functions and topics. One purpose of such summaries was to provide a description of the subject matter of the tests, of the knowledge required to carry them out, and to allow a judgement as to whether the first principle - that the tests should reflect the content and scope of the foreign language curriculum in schools - had been fulfilled.

The content of the tests had to be demonstrated in terms of skills as well as knowledge. In other words, the validity of the tests depended also on the kinds of tasks embodied in the tests and the extent to which these - and here is the second principle - reflected a consensus view of approaches to teaching and learning.

The physical contexts for the tests - 'contacts with the native speaker abroad and at home, reading texts of different kinds, listening to announcements or songs, writing to another young person and taking part in class activities' had been identified by an advisory group at the outset of the programme. These contexts, when considered in conjunction with the topics found typically in the school curriculum, provided a starting point for the elaboration of assessment tasks. The task-based approach adopted in developing the APU tests was thought to be consistent with teachers' views on communicative language teaching. It also provided the basis for identifying the particular skills which pupils would need to compete the tests successfully.

## Design of the APU tests

An examination of the assessment tasks showed that there was a restricted range of skills required for their performance and that these were associated with activities in listening, reading, speaking or writing. In listening and reading it was possible to identify a framework of skills which defined five kinds of mental activity involved in carrying out the assessment tasks:

- Understanding isolated words
- Understanding words within a short text
- Understanding the subject of a text
- Understanding the message of a text
- Overall understanding of an extended text

Similarly, for speaking and writing, simple frameworks could be identified by reviewing the language functions included in the summary of content and the kinds of tasks thought suitable for inclusion in the tests. The speaking framework included responding, asking questions, describing and reporting, within a range of tasks which required both structured and open-ended response. The writing framework also embraced structured and open-ended tasks, which involved giving personal information, describing and reporting, as well as the purely mechanical skills of copying and listing.

There was much in this design open to criticism on the grounds that it did not fully reflect the thinking of teachers who were particularly concerned to give authenticity to the learning activities they devised for use in the classroom. In particular, the discrete approach which aimed to assess separately the broad skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing, seemed at odds with efforts to engage pupils in mixed-skill activities. It was recognised also that the organisation of the tests to allow for the assessment of specific skills did not fully take into account the way in which such skills are often integrated in activities of authentic language use. Here again, decisions about the design of the tests reflected the way in which the main principles were balanced.

The broad areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing provided the initial framework for organising the assessment tasks; a further level of organisation was based on the five categories of understanding, in the case of listening and reading, and on the functions and task types identified as relevant to the tests of writing and speaking. In this way the listening and reading tests contained a variety of texts of different lengths, and questions reflected the complete range of skills. Similarly, in designing the writing and speaking tests, a balance was sought between the closely structured task types and the open-ended, and between the main functions referred to above. It is worth noticing here that the sampling of topics was made using five versions of each test and this facilitated the design of individual tests which were constructed primarily with reference to the framework of skills.

One of the principles which the design of the tests aimed to observe was that opportunities for pupils to perform well should be maximised. Another way of putting this is that the tests needed to provide evidence of positive achievement at the lowest as well as the highest level. As we have already seen, texts included in the listening and reading tests varied in length from a phrase, or a sentence or two, to passages containing one or two paragraphs. Questions may have focused on particular words, on the general meaning, or on detailed understanding. Even where detailed understanding of extended texts was sought, questions sometimes provided the opportunity to indicate where meanings were at least partially understood. In the speaking and writing tests the tasks were sequenced so that those undertaken first were closely structured and subsequent tasks progressively more open-ended.

Readers may recognise in this a concern to differentiate by outcome, rather than by the assessment task itself, while in the process attempting to safeguard the principle of giving pupils as wide an opportunity as possible to demonstrate their knowledge. This of course was a difficult compromise to achieve and the formula used inevitably involved degrees of failure as well as success for pupils taking the tests. This is another area in which the assessor's view runs counter to the teacher's view, which would hold that if the experience of taking tests is to be a positive one, the possibility of failure should be reduced to a minimum.

The framework of skills which underpinned the design of individual tests took account of a second principle - that results should provide details of pupils' knowledge and skills. Tests which rely on one or a few extended questions or which lack any organising principles may have their value, but it is likely that the overall test scores will be the only information they will provide for judging or interpreting performance. As we have seen, a major purpose of the APU surveys was to provide information about the variety of ways in which 13-year-olds could use the foreign language they had learnt. Because each test was made up of items or tasks drawn from each category of the relevant framework they provided evidence of pupils' performance on the complete range of skills. It was possible therefore to make judgements, first about performance in the broad areas of listening, reading, speaking and writing, and secondly, to calculate how well pupils had performed on particular tasks such as gist understanding, writing description or simple conversation. The overall test scores provided the evidence on which the performance of different groups could be compared, and the scores on particular tasks allowed more description of the pupils' foreign language ability. In meeting these twin aims, decisions about the assessment methods were as important as decisions about the design.

## The APU assessment methods

The term 'assessment methods' sometimes implies the whole of the testing process, including those aspects described here under Content and Design. In the context of the APU surveys it is intended to refer to the 'how' of the testing programme rather than the 'what' - how responses were elicited in the tests and how they were judged and recorded. It is the elicitation methods which are often at issue when views of learning and views of assessing come into conflict.

The example of the listening tests given above shows how views of teaching and learning influenced decisions about content and design, and how the need for certainty in measurement terms influenced decisions about methods. In both the listening and reading tests the concern to eliminate ambiguity led to the decision to exclude the use of the foreign language in the presentation of the tasks and the questions, and the questions themselves were confined to multiple choice and open-ended response format. Except where multiple choice questions reflected situations of authentic use, for example in cases where pupils had to choose from a fixed set of signs giving directions, these methods were not selected in an attempt to authenticate the activities involved. Indeed, revisions and modifications to the form of the test questions, carried out in the light of evidence provided by the statistical procedures which were followed in the course of developing the tests, were made only in the interests of establishing reliability.

It has often been pointed out that tests cannot fully meet the criterion of authenticity. The language content of a test can be based on authentic situations but the stimulus for its use cannot replicate the stimulus which is present when we make use of language in real life. The distinction between real questions and examination or test questions is that one focuses on the message and the other on the medium of communication. Test questions may simulate real life situations but the special rules which set them aside mean that they are in effect explicit requests to those taking the tests to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

In speaking and writing too, the methods adopted acknowledged that it was as important to ensure consistency in the results as it was to maximise opportunities for pupils, since the samples of the language elicited had to provide a reliable basis for comparison. In one sense, writing and speaking tests may be thought a more valid assessment of language performance than indirect tests, in which devices such as multiple choice questions have to be used. Their validity, however, is partly a function of their reliability, and this is sometimes notoriously difficult to establish. In speaking tests particularly, there are additional variables which interact from one context to another; the personality, mood and relationship of candidates and assessors, not to mention the psychological tensions inherent in the situation, are just some of the factors likely to influence the results.

The material in the APU speaking and writing test booklets for these reasons had to strike a balance between tasks which were used in quite explicit and, as we have seen, prescriptive terms, and tasks which allowed greater freedom for expression. In the case of the speaking tests a similar balance had to be sought by assessors in giving encouragement and opportunity while following standardised procedures. The success of such measures is always likely to be limited by the nature of the compromise itself, but on the other hand it can be enhanced by the care which is taken to provide as clear a stimulus as possible for the assessment tasks and by the training which is a necessary preparation for the speaking assessors if they are to administer tests in ways which are consistent from one occasion to another.

The second aspect of the assessment method is concerned with how performances were judged - often referred to as the criteria for assessment. The question of criteria in listening and reading, on the one hand, and speaking and writing, on the other, can be clearly distinguished. In tests of listening and reading it is normal for questions to elicit answers which can be marked right or wrong or according to an explicit scale which reflects the completeness or accuracy of the response. In these cases the criteria for judging results are to be found in the language input, the listening or reading texts, in combination with the questions asked, which in the case of APU, were associated with one or other of the categories of understanding. In this way, listening and reading test results are interpreted solely by the input to the test. By contrast, the criteria for interpreting results of speaking and writing tests derive from the language output, even if that has to be judged in relation to the stimulus for the performance of the tasks.

The methods devised for obtaining results in the APU listening and reading tests had to meet the purpose of comparing and describing performance. In order to make comparisons there was, of course, no obvious alternative to the traditional method of aggregating marks to provide overall test scores or scores on subsets of items. However, in order to provide descriptive information quite different methods had to be developed.

The subset scores provided a very broad level of description by indicating standards of performance on different categories - retrieving information, gist understanding and so on. In order to obtain more detailed information, methods were devised by which the full range of responses could be analysed. The first of these methods was a variation on the approach by which a key to correct answers is produced as a reference in marking right or wrong. In the case of many open-ended questions, similar keys were produced by reviewing samples of pupils' responses, but these included answers deemed incorrect as well as correct. Among these, particular answers were grouped and coded so that results could be reviewed to throw light on ways in which pupils interpreted the texts, and on the extent to which their answers might be thought to have been partially correct, even if grouped among those judged incorrect when it was necessary to apply a dichotomous marking system.

A second method was employed to provide a detailed analysis of pupils' responses to items in the category involving overall understanding of extended tests. All responses were recorded and different responses to each question were grouped and coded according to the details selected as relevant to the answer. Up to ten different patterns of response could, in this way, be identified. Although such methods are laborious when carried out on a large scale they are clearly more sensitive when it comes to recognising what is positive about pupils' efforts, and they are helpful also in analysing errors.

The methods used for deriving scores in speaking and writing were based on explicitly defined scales which distinguished six levels of performance. The scale for assessing performance in extended speaking is illustrated below as an example:

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5 Uses a range of structures and vocabulary relevant to the performance of the task. In general grammatically accurate. Uses appropriate tense or tense indicators.

4 Performs the task adequately, using only one or two structures but an appropriate range of vocabulary. Makes some grammatical errors which do not obscure meaning. Some attempts to use tenses (or tense indicators) other than the present, if appropriate.

3 Performs the task at a minimum level. Structures and vocabulary are limited in range, and sometimes used inappropriately.

2 Does not perform the task appropriately. Produces some relevant language, but in fragmented form. Frequent grammatical errors. May resort to English.

1 Produces only one or two relevant words or phrases.

0 Produces nothing relevant to the task set.

- Not attempted.

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Scales such as this were formulated for each task type in writing and speaking. All scales were developed by reviewing a representative range of performances and identifying the main features of each. In the course of the development two important conclusions were reached. First, the criteria identified as relevant needed to be conflated in the descriptions produced for each level of performance; attempts to aggregate scores for separate criteria were found to be less reliable. Secondly, the criterial descriptions needed to be expressed as economically as possible if markers were to apply to them consistently.

The rationale of the scales was based firmly on the notion of communicative effectiveness. It rejected the supremacy of quantity and accuracy which had traditionally governed the assessment of writing and speaking, and accepted that elements such as grammatical and phonetical accuracy, immediacy of response, choice and range of vocabulary, and structure and fluency of expression, might all contribute to the effectiveness of a performance. At the same time, it was accepted that individual criteria, although sometimes interdependent, needed to be considered in relation to the task. For example, fluency would be more likely to feature in extended speaking than in briefer, more mechanical exchanges. The concept of *'relevance to the task'* which was central to the APU scales of performance, tacitly acknowledged another factor which was often absent from traditional methods of assessment - namely that judgements needed to be made as much by what was omitted as by what was included in the performance. It posed the question: what might have made this a more complete or more acceptable performance?

In order to provide descriptive information about the knowledge and skills pupils bring to the performance of different tasks, methods were developed to carry out a detailed analysis of samples of the speaking tapes and the writing scripts. For extended writing the analytic scheme covered four areas: length of script, development, content and complexity. Details of length were established by applying a proven system of counting words; development was characterised by distinguishing the degrees to which sentences were successfully structured and coherently sequenced; content was described by recording references to the different elements of the task; and complexity was expressed in terms of cohesion, for example, use of link words, variation in sentence structure and references to person and time. A similar scheme in speaking was used to examine performance in relation to these features: lexis, word formation, sentence formation, pronunciation, fluency, recognition of role, control of task, logical sequencing, use of cohesive devices and achievement strategies. Although analytic procedures such as these are more likely to be used in the context of research, particularly as they are laborious to implement, they embody principles which are potentially useful in situations where assessment aims to support the learning of both individuals and groups.

## Modern Languages in Schools (MODLS)

In the final phase of the foreign language monitoring programme, carried out for the APU, discussions had taken place between the Unit and the survey team at the NFER about ways in which teachers in schools might benefit directly from the work which had been carried out. It was with this aim in mind that the DES commissioned the MODLS project - a two-year development programme which was to involve collaboration with teachers and the production of foreign language assessment materials for use in schools.

In planning the project it was intended that the products of the APU monitoring programme would be available as a resource. It was thought that perhaps the tests of listening, speaking, reading and writing in French, German and Spanish might be capable of adaptation and could be used by teachers for diagnostic or summative purposes. It was acknowledged at the same time that the assessment materials created by the APU monitoring programme went far beyond the individually constructed tests. Resources available included the framework devised for the construction of the tests, the techniques for developing assessment tasks, the procedures for administering tests, methods of scoring and interpreting results, the scales for assessing performance and approaches to the analysis of errors. It was not possible to predict which of these techniques might be useful in guiding the production of new procedures until the teacher groups had been formed and priorities established.

A guiding principle of the work of the MODLS project was that the teachers needed to analyse their own problems and needs and work out solutions which were appropriate to the individual circumstances in which they taught. According to this principle there would be no ready made solutions to the problem they were tackling - the development of an integrated system of assessment for use on a day-to-day basis in the classroom. For this reason it was perhaps not surprising that initially no direct use could be made of the APU tests in the work they were undertaking. The tests were, in a sense, a prescription and not capable of being readily incorporated into existing schemes of work. What was needed was a clear view of the purposes and applications of the approaches being developed so that techniques and practices, whether derived from APU or from other sources such as the profiling movement or graded tests, could be assimilated with understanding and adapted to ensure their relevance in practice.

The process by which teachers in the MODLS project carried out the development is illustrated in the diagram below:

Needs analysis
View of assessment | Specific priorities
Initial development of material/procedures
Implementation
Evaluation of progress
Modification and further development
Incorporation of measures into existing practice

This scheme provided for a staged approach in which the participating teachers analysed their needs, and examined concepts of assessment; they collaborated to plan and implement new measures in a principled way, and they subjected these to rigorous appraisal before adopting them for use on a permanent basis. Throughout this process there was constant reference to the purposes, tasks and methods deemed relevant to the needs of classroom assessment, as it was recognised that they needed to be considered in conjunction when approaches were being planned. Although the work proceeded by developing procedures in specific areas, selected in order to produce concrete results at an early stage of the project, the description of the work which follows will be organised according to the separate issues of purposes, tasks and methods.

## Purposes of classroom assessment

In order to clarify the purposes of a system of classroom assessment the MODLS teachers first identified a number of issues with which they were currently concerned. These included:

- continuous assessment, particularly oral assessment
- mixed skill assessment
- pupil profiling
- the use of authentic materials or activities in assessment

A further stage was to consider some basic principles governing assessment and to set out priorities from which it would be possible to identify a starting point for the development. These were as follows:

- organisational and practical questions
- peer and self assessment
- assessment of pairs or groups
- appropriate tasks
- relevant criteria
- means of recording assessment information

Many of these preoccupations have to do with what should be assessed and how. The question of why assessment is needed is perhaps an easy one to overlook when its role in teaching and learning is often taken for granted. Nevertheless, the identification of priorities in terms which alluded to the kinds of tasks and methods teachers thought appropriate to internal assessment, provided an indication of the purposes which teachers had in mind.

The purposes of the APU surveys were concentrated on identifying levels of achievement reached by pupils at a particular stage of their schooling. These summative purposes, usually associated with external assessment, are shared also by teachers who need to make statements about pupils' attainment in reporting to colleagues and parents or in assigning pupils to groups. The MODLS teachers recognised that this was one of the functions of classroom assessment but placed much greater emphasis on formative purposes.

The formative emphasis was reflected in the high priority accorded to the need for frequent and regular assessments to cover the content of the coursework their pupils were following. It was thought that records should be kept on pupils' performance across the complete range of topics and activities making up the course. Moreover, records should provide information not only about pupils' knowledge and skills, but their attitudes also. The clear implication was that assessment needed to be concerned with the process as well as the outcome of the learning. The purposes of classroom assessment, as it was envisaged by the MODLS teachers, could be summarised therefore as follows:

- accumulating detailed information on pupils' progress

- reporting on pupils' achievement
- identifying pupils' strengths and weaknesses
- supporting pupils' learning
- increasing pupils' motivation
- evaluating coursework

The variety of purposes identified called for a unified system of assessment which could allow progress to be monitored and which could combine the variety of procedures which were likely to be needed. The work focused for this reason on the development of record sheets or grids on which information could be accumulated in a sufficiently detailed form to meet both summative and formative purposes.

## Tasks for classroom assessment

Assessment has often been interpreted narrowly in that it has been associated solely with testing, with measuring the achievement of pupils in relation to learning objectives or with the achievement of other pupils. In this sense there can only be assessment of tasks which meet all the conditions of tests - those that have a clear presentation for the purposes of stimulating the activity intended and eliciting a particular response which can subsequently be judged. Such assessments always have a degree of formality and tend to focus on outcomes only.

In order to meet their purposes the MODLS teachers recognised that they needed to make assessments, not only of the tasks which could be formally tested in conventional ways but also of the tasks and activities which are conducted informally as part of the pupils' coursework. There are, of course, a great variety of activities undertaken in class, ranging from tasks used to practise, rehearse or consolidate new material to those which represent a final performance. Nearly all tasks have a stimulus and an activity but many may be organised informally with pupils working together and some may have no concrete outcome. The question to be answered was which of these needed to be assessed; which assessment would need to be recorded to meet the purposes identified.

When it was clear that assessments needed to be made in situations that could sometimes not be controlled by the teacher, for example where pupils worked alone, with each other, or with classroom assistants, procedures had to be developed to take these into account.

Tests could clearly still meet some of the purposes of classroom assessment but consideration had to be given also to the use of performance scales, checklists, questionnaires and self-reports to provide an effective means of monitoring performance of the many activities carried out informally.

These procedures differed from external assessments in some important respects. Tests used in class, for example, could meet the criterion of explicitness without making as many concessions to the demands of measurement as is the case in externally devised tests. There was no need to compromise on the use of the foreign language for presentation since teachers would always ensure that the language content had been fully rehearsed in advance, nor was there any need to be as restrictive in the format of questions used, since results, even if intended for comparisons, could always be interpreted against a broader background of assessment. Another fundamental difference was that internal assessment procedures had to provide evidence of process and attitudes if teachers were to provide the support for learning which they believed was one of the primary functions of classroom assessment.

We have already noted that in interpreting the results of tests, we need to turn to the content and design of the test as well as the formulation of the tasks in order fully to understand their meaning. In classroom assessment the context is not likely to be explicit. A mark, say for listening, will not be informative unless it is made clear what kind of text was involved, what level of understanding was required and what were the circumstances in which the listening task was carried out. An example of how record sheets were designed to provide information as a background for the interpretation of results in listening and reading is shown below.

### PUPIL'S GRID FOR LISTENING AND READING

Enter your own estimate in all these categories:

TEXT: Letter, advert, dialogue etc.

TASK:

1. Just read or listen; no response.
2. Answer questions, oral or written.
3. Part of integrated assignment.

RANGE:

1. Contains mostly newly introduced material.
2. Topic-based but contains previously learnt material.
3. Contains unfamiliar material.

LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING:

1. Pick out specific information.
2. Understand gist.
3. Detailed and full understanding.

LEVEL OF INDEPENDENCE:

1. Worked with others.
2. Worked alone with reference material.
3. Worked alone without reference material.

MARKS: Enter the marks awarded according to the mark scheme, e.g. 7/9

COMMENTS:

Enter your own assessment of how you performed on this scale:

1. I could complete only a small part of the task.
2. I could complete some of the task.
3. I could complete all or nearly all of the task.

And indicate anything that helped you in the task, or that made it more difficult, and areas that need more attention by you and/or help from me.

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The categories defined under the headings: Text, Range, Level of Understanding and Level of Independence allowed details of the listening and reading tasks to be recorded on a separate record sheet, using the numbers 1-3 as codes. Marks and comments would be entered alongside by the teacher or by pupils. The records accumulated by the use of the associated grid made it possible to analyse results by reference to information about the tasks and in a way which might throw light on the pupils' strengths and weakness and the effectiveness of decisions about the selection and sequencing of the coursework.

## Methods of classroom assessment

We have already seen how in the MODLS project a variety of assessment methods were envisaged, including teacher, peer and self assessment, using impressionistic marks, reference to specific criteria, scales or written comments. Sometimes the method was dictated by the circumstances. For some reading activities, for example, there may have been no alternative to self-assessment in which pupils recorded a comment about enjoyment (attitudinal) and, perhaps, difficulty (analytical). Sometimes the choice of method was made on educational grounds; sometimes the choice was a matter of practicality.

The first question to be considered by the teacher was how, in practical terms, the assessments were to be carried out. It was agreed that there was no satisfactory solution to the problem, particularly in oral assessment, while remaining attached to the idea that the teacher should always be centrally involved. Oral assessment is a good example of the benefits which accrue if pupils are encouraged and trained to participate. When teachers devised procedures for pupils to carry out and assess the performance of tasks in pairs or groups, more assessment information was made available and the teachers themselves were freed to support, observe, listen and note complementary assessments on individuals, groups or whole classes.

Teachers were adamant that the methods devised should not add to existing burdens or interfere with schemes for teaching and learning. This was a good reason also for focusing the assessment exercise on the use of grids which could be maintained largely by pupils and combine systematically all background information - topics, tasks, criteria and so on - with results, whether recorded by teachers or pupils. In the MODLS project measures taken to reduce burdens included:

- using the same grid for a variety of purposes (for example, periodic test results, continuous assessments and feedback comments);

- the transfer by pupils of information on individual records to class progress charts;

- using the same scales and the same system for entering both pupil and teacher assessments;

- using computing or word-processing facilities for maintaining records and producing individual reports.

It was in tackling the question of how judgements are to be made and acted upon that teachers found the traditions of external assessment least helpful, particularly where pupils were involved in assessing spoken language. While the use of scales, such as those used in APU, might have been useful in teacher assessment, they involved judgements which pupils were likely to find difficult and, moreover, they did not provide enough detail to be informative to pupils. A scheme such as that illustrated below provided more analysis of performance and simple yes/no judgements, easily accessible to pupils:

TASK: ......................................................................

ROLE: ......................................................................

| | Part 1 | Part 2 | Part 3 | Part 4 | Part 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 COMMUNICATION<br>I can ask the question properly | | | | | |
| 2 UNDERSTANDING<br>I can understand the answer given | | | | | |
| 3 ACCURACY<br>I can say this without any mistakes | | | | | |
| 4 CONFIDENCE<br>I can speak clearly and without hesitation | | | | | |
| 5 AUTHENTICITY<br>I am trying to sound like a Spanish speaker | | | | | |

As useful as this scheme may have been, its problem was that it could apply only to mechanical role plays in which individual utterances could be judged. Another attempt to produce materials for oral assessment which would be more flexible combined quantitative and qualitative judgements, using two complementary grids, one providing detailed information, capable of being completed by teachers and pupils, the other being a self-assessment record. The self-assessment record allowed for straightforward judgements on simple role plays ...

NAME OF PUPIL:

SCALE

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | Could do it all | V | Didn't know the word(s) |
| 3 | Could do most of it | | |
| 2 | Could do some of it | H | Wasn't sure how to go about it |
| 1 | Could do little or none of it | | |

| TOPIC/TASK | ASSESSED BY | SCORE |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |

... and more analytical judgements in the case of extended oral work. An important feature of this part of the self-assessment record was that, although it refers to particular performance criteria, it is formulated so that it can be readily applied by pupils. It was found, for example, that it was inappropriate to refer to accuracy explicitly since pupils were not likely to be able to judge this independently.

EXTENDED ORAL WORK

PUPIL'S NAME

ASSESSMENT

AN ASSESSMENT OF MYSELF/MY PARTNER: ------------------

------------------------------------------------------

| I/YOU/HE/SHE | ALWAYS | USUALLY | SOMETIMES | ONLY WITH HELP |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| understand(s) questions | | | | |
| get(s) the message across | | | | |
| know(s) the words needed | | | | |
| obtain(s) the information needed | | | | |
| answer(s) without hesitation | | | | |
| speak(s) with a good accent | | | | |
| say(s) more than the minimum | | | | |
| take(s) the initiative | | | | |

The self-assessment records were an important aspect of the MODLS development which wished to emphasise the role of assessment in supporting learning. While acknowledging the need for further development, the potential benefits were identified as follows:

- pupils have increased awareness of course objectives;
- pupils have increased understanding of the criteria for performance;
- pupils have more control over their own learning.

The advantages to pupils of self-assessment may be generated partly by the very process of completing records. There are, however, a number of methods which teachers found useful in ensuring that the benefits were secured. For example, an intermediate or partial assessment could identify problems and allow feedback in time to reduce the prospects of failure when pupils performed tasks. An intermediate assessment might have been one in which pupils' preparation for an oral task, or their rough draft produced for writing, could be assessed by the teacher so that improvements could be made in the final performance. It would also provide insights into the ways in which pupils developed strategies and skills. A partial assessment might have involved observation of only some pupils, allowing teachers to provide early feedback to the whole class. Such procedures illustrate the flexibility of classroom assessment in which, in contrast to external assessment, it is not always necessary to standardise methods nor to collect data on all pupils on each assessment occasion.

The work of the MODLS project did not result in a comprehensive set of materials which would provide others with the means to implement a coherent system of classroom assessment. Specific materials were produced, relevant to the situations in which they were to be used and, more important, some general principles were established. These principles can be expressed simply under four headings:

### PRACTICABILITY

Assessment grids must be simple and economic to use on a regular basis. Pupils must have no difficulty in learning how to implement them and, when in use, they should not interfere with plans for teaching.

### INTELLIGIBILITY

Assessment grids should be expressed as simply as possible. Results should be easily interpretable by both teachers and pupils and capable of providing immediate feedback.

### FLEXIBILITY

Assessment grids should allow for assessments to be recorded across as wide a range of activities as possible. They should also take into account the possibility of teacher assessment, peer assessment or self assessment.

RELEVANCE

The information provided must be relevant to the purposes identified. Results should include marks therefore to allow for reporting, and adequate descriptive information to provide feedback.

A final point is about the definition of classroom assessment. Even if it derives from a different set of purposes than is the case in external assessment it came, in the course of the development, to be seen as one element in a complementary system which ensures that the reporting on progress and achievement is informed by teachers' and even pupils' observations on the one hand and by more objective judgements on the other.

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## Notes

1. Examples of the APU test material are fully illustrated elsewhere, notably in the APU short reports: (Boyce and Portal, 1987), (Dickson, 1987) and (Lee, 1987).

2. The grids used to illustrate the work of the MODLS project are samples of assessment material produced by teachers in Birmingham, Wiltshire and Lancashire. These are illustrated more fully in *Assessment in Action* (Lee and Dickson, 1989).

CHAPTER SEVEN

# WHY DO I HAVE TO GET IT RIGHT ANYWAY?

*Brian Page*

The difference between the old and the new objectives for foreign language teaching have always been neatly summed up for me in a parable published over twenty years ago (Corbett, 1965).

The author recounts how, falling asleep after finishing marking his last GCE 'O' level translation paper one night, he dreams he is back in India where he served in the army. He is teaching English to two Indian soldiers. Suddenly there is commotion in the camp as it is learned that a dangerous tiger is about and also that the colonels' and the adjutant's ladies have gone into the jungle to pick flowers. They must be brought back quickly. The author seizes the opportunity and gives his two soldiers an Urdu sentence to translate and sends them off to look for the ladies. The sentence reads (in Urdu): *'Depart very quickly for an enormous tiger is approaching.'* A little later, one soldier reappears with an alarmed and breathless lady who is nevertheless unharmed. The second eventually arrives escorting the stretcher carrying the expiring remains of the other lady. How had the soldiers translated their sentences? The first lady reported that her soldier had said: *'You run quick big tiger he come.'* Using the GCE 'O' level marking scheme he had been applying before he fell asleep the author assessed it. 'This was clearly deplorable: -3 straight away for 'you run'; -2 for mood (indicative instead of imperative) and -1 for vocabulary (I might have accepted 'run away' or even 'run back', but 'run' alone was clearly inadmissible) ... Next 'quick': ... the scheme imposed a maximum deduction of 1 for any adverb. 'For' omitted -1; luckily for him I had not used 'since': the maximum deduction for a subordinating conjunction is 2 but for a coordinating conjunction only 1. 'Big' I thought inadequate for the Urdu word I had used: I wanted 'enormous', 'huge' or 'immense'; -1 therefore for vocabulary. -1 for 'he' as being superfluous, whether or not it was admissible as to gender. 'Come' was at least -2 for gross breach of concord .... Total penalisation was therefore -9 and the mark for the sentence 1 out of 10.'

The second lady managed to express in her dying breath what the other soldier had said: *'Listen very carefully for a little bird is singing.'*

The author continues. 'This was a very different matter. Syntactically it was perfect; there were, however, some errors of vocabulary - five in all - for which I had to make the appropriate deduction of one mark each. This soldier therefore scored 5 out of 10 and passed.'

The point the author was making in 1965 has been thoroughly accepted now, much to most people's relief. Grammar *per* se has been downgraded. It is now seen as serving the purpose of communication and not as existing as an independent self-justifying system. This argument, too, has always been accepted though with a slightly different slant. In 1954 the Modern Language Association published a pamphlet entitled *Grammar in relation to language learning*. In a section headed 'The necessity for accuracy in the study of languages in schools' it says: *'The study of grammatical accuracy and function .... is indispensable for the achievement of a reasonable standard of accuracy in the use of language .... Looseness in the use of language leads to loose thinking and robs the language of its capacity for precise expression.'* It is clear that the authors see correct grammar as essential in making communications more exact. This is a common view still widely held. Yet it is obviously untrue. Grammatical accuracy is not always essential for accurate communication. Ungrammatical utterances do not always convey messages less accurately. Nor are they necessarily indicative of muddled thought. There is no *'loose thinking'* or lack of *'precise expression'* about: *'You run quick big tiger he come'*. It would be difficult to convey the message more succinctly, more urgently and more successfully. No English speaker hearing it would be in any doubt about the nature of the situation and the course of action that was being urged. It is this that modern examinations like GCSE recognise and that is why, at certain levels, full marks are awarded to such an utterance. It remains, however, that *'You run quick big tiger he come'* is wrong. No native English speaker would produce such an utterance except for comic effect. In that sense it is not English at all. But since we cannot condemn it in terms of 'practical communication' - the objective of our language learning - on what grounds can we in fact condemn it? Are we to fall back on the position that we occupied before - you have to get it right because you have to get it right because that is how the language is? It seems a poor argument. What we must ask ourselves is, if correct grammar is not necessary for communication what is correct grammar for? What is the communicative value of correct grammar? The answer is clear. Correct grammar, like pronunciation, serves a social function. It tells the world something about what sort of person we are in the same way as our clothes, our lifestyle, and the newspaper we read. We adopt the pronunciation and grammar of the group with which we wish to be identified. Most Scots always see themselves as Scots and therefore rarely lose their accents. Northerners, until comparatively recently, have often not had that confidence in their identity and, transposed into educated southern circles, frequently lose most of their accent. A taxi driver in an East End pub would not use the pronunciation and grammar of an Eton and Trinity senior civil servant unless he wished to invite ribald comment. Our use of language, including the accuracy of our grammar, invites interlocutors to regard us in a certain light and therefore to treat us in certain ways. Grammar does indeed have a communicative value but not necessarily in the transmission of the objective message. It transmits an image of the speaker. Most speakers wish to be accepted by their hearers so the use of correct grammar is mostly integrative in intent rather than instrumental. In foreign language learning the image projected by the learner to the native speaker can be a powerful motivator, particularly among adult learners. They are frequently the ones who want to get it 'right' because they don't want to appear foolish. Those whose professional self-image depends on accurate and elegant communication, (university academics are a good example), are frequently much more inhibited as language learners because they feel embarrassed at appearing diminished in the foreign language in an area essential to their being. The East End taxi driver is less so because his self-image depends on being a good taxi driver, a concept not endangered by his fractured French.

Degrees of embarrassment are, however, unlikely to yield a set of reliable assessment criteria. Interlocutor reaction will more readily produce useful definitions. If the learner speaks in certain ways what will the sympathetic native speaker think and what will be the effect on her linguistic behaviour? The answers could produce the criteria set out in Figure 1. It should be possible to refine them into an assessment instrument along the same lines as those used by the NEA to judge foreign language production for GCSE. I should stress that these are a first attempt, have not been field-tested and are therefore imperfect and/or impractical in many ways. Nonetheless, they do seem to me to present a way out of the current impasse. If we can set up an assessment instrument in this way we can talk to our learners about improving their grammar for communicative reasons. The same goes for the 'variety of expression' that leads, among other things, to the 'fuller descriptions' mentioned in the GCSE assessment criteria examined in Chapter 5. We can say: You should try to get your adjectives right and acquire as wide a vocabulary as possible because then you will communicate to your native speaker friend a much truer picture of yourself. S/he will be able to respond in a more natural manner and your relationship will be the richer and the more interesting. Or, if you find yourself working abroad, buying and selling for example, the impression you create on your potential customer or client will be that much more favourable.

Fig. 1

### Possible assessment criteria based on sympathetic native speaker reaction

In each case the informational content of the message is effectively conveyed.

1. Learner utterance: single or two-word utterances, strong interference from native pronunciation, considerable hesitation while searching for words, gesture, mime and illustrative sounds, e.g. *Bank here? Where station? No like.*

   SNS likely reaction: single words spoken slowly and clearly while facing learner, much repetition and constant checking of understanding using words like *oui? compris?* Use of gesture, mime and illustrative sounds, etc.

2. Learner utterance: strings several words together but ungrammatically, heavily accented and very limited vocabulary, e.g. *Big tiger he come.*

   SNS likely reaction: very simple sentences, slowly and clearly pronounced, use of mime and gesture.

3. Learner utterance: longer sentences, many well formed but most containing formal errors of some sort, few subordinate clauses or pronouns other than subject, a limited vocabulary which involves repetition and circumlocution to ensure communication, mispronunciations do not hinder commmunication but make the language distinctly non-standard.

   SNS reaction: normal unhurried speech, some complex sentences, standard expressions, avoids slang and regionalisms.

4. Learner utterance: near native production, no conspicuous or consistent errors, wide range of vocabulary including some informal or slang expressions.

   SNS reaction: almost natural speech, few allowances made, awareness that communication might break down if speed or amount of non-standard language is great.

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# BIOGRAPHIES

**RICHARD BEATON** works at the North Yorkshire Language Centre in York, and has worked in the field of resources, materials development and INSET provision for some fifteen years. His article arose partly from some earlier work on continuous oral assessment in GCSE Modern Languages, but is also the result of conversations with practising teachers.

**PETER DICKSON** was a secondary school teacher of French and Russian in the independent and maintained sectors for twenty years. He was a contributor to the development of graded objectives in Oxfordshire and a member of the National Co-ordinating Committee for Graded Objectives. He was appointed a researcher and research manager at the National Foundation for Educational Research in 1981 and is currently head of its foreign languages unit. He was Director of the Assessment of Performance Unit surveys of foreign languages and has directed other projects including the evaluation of teacher exchange, diversification and flexible learning.

**STELLA MARSH** is an independent Language Teaching Consultant, with a current TVEI contract for curriculum development and schools/industry links in Sunderland. She is a member of the National Committee for Graded Objectives in Modern Languages and of the French Committee of ALL, Regional Co-ordinator of the North-East Festival of Languages and chairs the Festival of Languages national committee.

She has taught French for many years in schools, initial and in-service teacher training and FE, including a Business Language Unit. A major focus of her in-service work has been the development and co-ordination, over the last ten years, of the Durham Graded Objectives Scheme, which stresses the importance of classroom skills and management. Assessment has evolved as a continuous process within the teaching situation, as described in her chapter.

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His publications include: *Techniques of evaluation for a notional syllabus*, RSA, 1977. 'Communicative language testing: revolution or evolution'. In Brumfit & Johnson (eds) (1980) *The communicative approach to language teaching*, OUP. *Communication in the classroom* (ed. with K Johnson) (1981), Longman.

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In her previous post (at St Wilfrid's School, Crawley, West Sussex) she taught French from years 3-7 and some German.

While working in Crawley, she was a Head of Department, then a Head of Year. She dealt with students at point of transfer between schools and with the associated information on students' progress.

During this time she was involved in the implementation of the West Sussex Modern Languages Graded Objectives Scheme (GOALS). In addition, she was in the Working Group which developed the SEG Modular French GCSE. This 100% coursework assessed syllabus has now been piloted and evaluated and approved by SEAC as a Mode 1.

Rosemary became increasingly interested in ways of assessing different aspects of students' work and eventually took on responsibility for Profiling and Records of Achievement in the school.

In 1989 she was seconded for a term by West Sussex, to work on Modern Languages Assessment, Profiling and Records of Achievement, and the Authority has now produced her report on languages assessment and current developments.

**BRIAN PAGE** is Director of the Foreign Language Teaching Unit in the University of Leeds. He was formerly a secondary school teacher and he is still closely involved with schools through teaching PGCE students and taking part in many INSET courses. He was concerned with the graded objectives movement from the beginning and was a member of the JMB working parties which led to new examinations at both 16+ and 'A' level. He is currently President of the Association for Language Learning.

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